

942
913
1918

STORIES OF EARLY BRITISH HEROES

By
C. GASQUOINE HARTLEY

With Illustrations
By
PATTEN WILSON



J. M. DENT & SONS LTD.
TORONTO AND LONDON



**STORIES OF
EARLY BRITISH HEROES**



Merlin brings the Boy Arthur to Court.

STORIES OF EARLY BRITISH HEROES

By
C. GASQUOINE HARTLEY

With Illustrations
By
PATTER WILSON



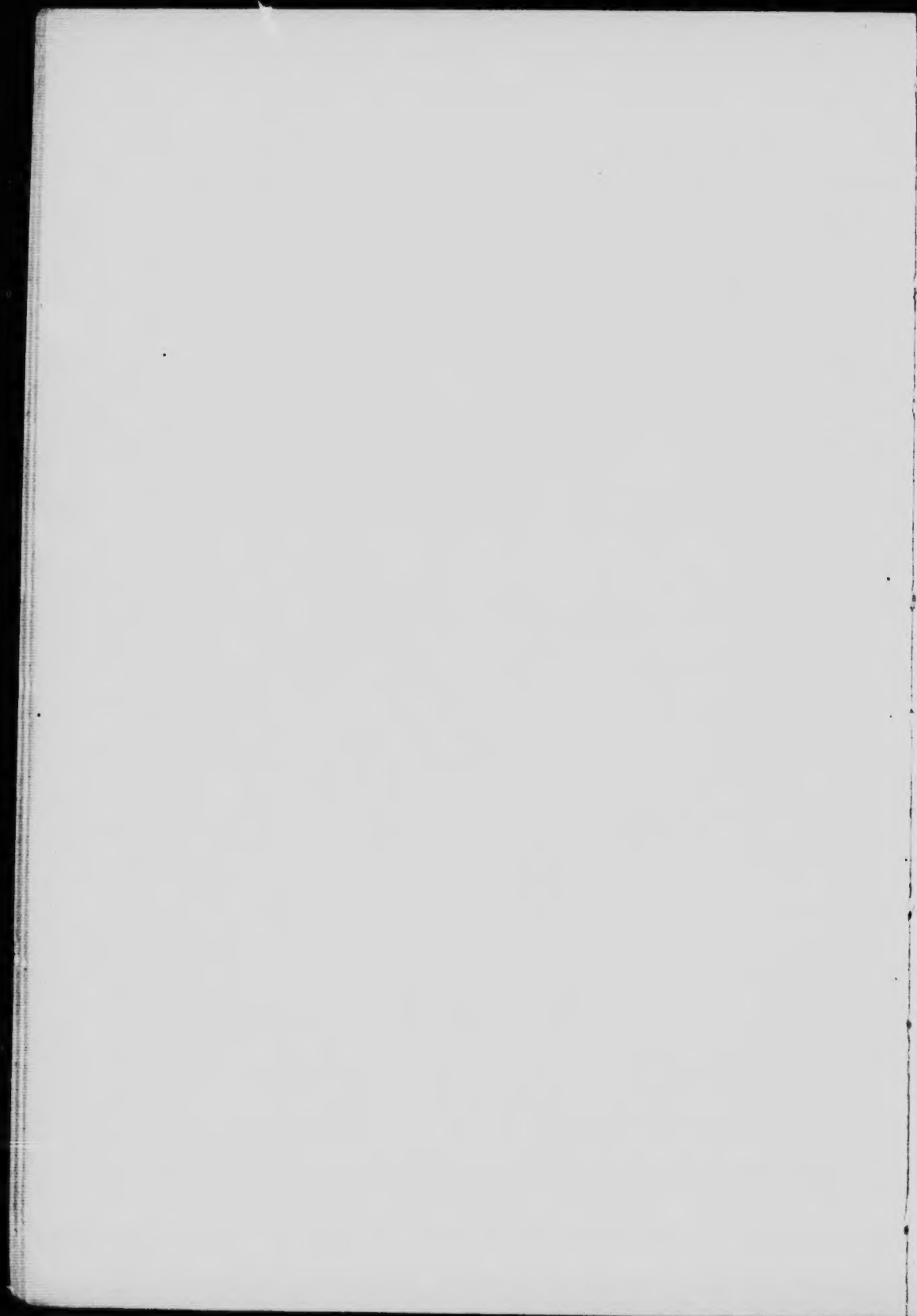
J. M. DENT & SONS LTD.
TORONTO AND LONDON

36940

Copyright, Canada, 1918,
by J. M. DENT & SONS, Limited
Toronto.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTIO	7
STORY I	
THE COMING OF JULIUS CÆSAR TO BRITAIN	9
STORY II	
THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY INTO BRITAIN	29
STORY III	
THE COMING OF THE SAXONS	42
STORY IV	
THE MARVELLOUS LIFE OF THE PROPHET MERLIN	63
STORY V	
THE REIGN OF ARTHUR, THE GREAT HERO PRINCE	91



INTRODUCTION

THE stories of this book are taken from an old chronicle known as the *History of the Britons* written by a Welshman named Geoffrey, who lived at Monmouth about the time of Henry I. of England. Geoffrey was angry when he found that the chronicles already in existence told only of the great deeds of the Saxons and said nothing of the earlier race known to history as the Britons or Celts, to which Geoffrey himself belonged. So he set to work to trace the story of these people from the very earliest times and to give the account of the Saxon Conquest from the British point of view.

His Chronicle was written in Latin, and it tells in stirring style of the valiant deeds of the British heroes as Geoffrey had heard of them from legends and other sources. His work is not real history but a great romance, and its value lies in the fact that it helps us to realize the life of the earliest days as well as the patriotic spirit of the first of the sons of Britain. Geoffrey's account begins with the story of Brutus, the great-grandson of Æneas, of whom Virgil the great Latin poet tells in his

Æneid, and who is said to have been the founder of the British nation. Then he tells how Humber, a fierce sea-robber, came to Britain and fought with the sons of Brutus, and how he was conquered and drowned in the river which took his name. Next follows, among other stories, a legend of Sabren, the captive princess who was drowned in what came to be known as the River Severn. The sad history of King Leir is told, and many stories of later princes, until we come to the time when the outside world began to take more interest in the far-off isle of Britain. This brings us to the story of the landings of Julius Cæsar which follows herewith.



STORY I

The Coming of Julius Cæsar to Britain. The Britons fight with the greatest bravery and twice overcome Cæsar, but at last they are obliged to yield, through the treachery of one of the British generals.

[NOTE.—In reading this account of the invasion of Julius Cæsar, we must remember that Geoffrey's account is not *historically* true. His great idea was to glorify the British nation; and he tells the story to accomplish that end. But although *historically* untrue, his account is of great value. It tells us about the early British heroes, and shows us how bravely they fought. They were beaten by the Romans, but only after hard fighting; and all their enemies acknowledged that they were courageous men. Geoffrey gathered his story from the old legends of Britain, and it may be that there is more truth in the story than we are inclined to think.]

ALL through these years no foreign foe had come to trouble the British nation. But the time had

come when they were to enjoy this peace no longer. Julius Cæsar, the great Roman general, began to cast covetous eyes upon the little island, whose fame had already spread to distant lands. He had conquered all the provinces of Gaul, and while travelling in the northern part of that country, he saw the outline of the British coast. He asked his attendants what the country was, and who the people were who inhabited it. The story runs that, when he heard the island was Britain, he stood for a long time gazing fixedly out upon the sea, and then said: "In truth we Romans and the Britons have the same origin, since we are both descended from the Trojan race. *Our* first father was Æneas, *theirs* Brutus, the great-grandson of Æneas. The same blood flows in us both; we are, in truth, brothers! But they have lived far away, separated by the ocean, from the whole world. Doubtless they are savages who know little or nothing of the art of war. They may easily be forced to become our slaves, and be made subject to the Roman state. But, before we invade or assault them, we must send word to them, asking them to submit themselves peaceably unto us, even as all the rest of the world has done. For did we proceed against them without giving them this offer, we should violate the nobility of our race, by shedding the blood of our kinsmen."

Early British Heroes

11

The greatest indignation seized the British people when this message of Julius Cæsar reached them, demanding the subjection of the island to the authority of Rome. The King of Britain at that time was Cassibellanus, a strong and powerful prince, who was much loved by all his subjects. Without a moment's hesitation, he determined to resist Cæsar's demand. He consulted with his nobles, and then sent this letter to Rome :—

“Cassibellanus, King of the Britons, to Caius Julius Cæsar. We cannot but wonder, Cæsar, at the avarice of the Roman people. Their unsatiable thirst for money cannot let us alone, although the dangers of the ocean have placed us, in a manner, out of the world. They have the presumption to covet our substance, which we have hitherto enjoyed in quiet. And more than this, they say we must choose subjection and slavery to Rome, and must give up our former liberty. The demand, Cæsar, is scandalous! The same vein of nobility flows from Æneas, in both Britons and Romans; the same chain of brotherhood unites us! This ought to be a band of union and friendship between us. It is *this* which you ought to have asked from us, and not slavery. We have learned to acknowledge the one, but never to bear the other. We have been so accustomed to liberty

that we are *perfectly ignorant* of what it is to submit to slavery. And even if the gods themselves should attempt to deprive us of our liberty, we would resist them, to the utmost of our power, in defence of it. Know then, Cæsar, that we are ready to fight for our freedom and our kingdom if, as you threaten, you attempt to invade Britain."

As soon as he received this answer, Cæsar made ready his fleet. He waited until the wind stood fair; he then hoisted his sails, and soon arrived at the mouth of the river Thames with his huge army.

Cassibellanus was there to meet him with an immense force, composed of the whole strength of the British nation. It was led by the chief nobles, the two most important of whom were Nennius, the brother of Cassibellanus, and his nephew Androgeus, the Duke of Kent and Trinovantum.

The British army lost no time. The chief aim of Cassibellanus was to attack the Romans immediately upon landing. He wished to weaken their power before Cæsar had been able to seize any fortress, and so gain a foothold in the country. Accordingly he marched his army towards the sea-shore, where the Romans had pitched their camp. Both armies drew out in order of battle, and before long the fight began.

Bows and arrows and also swords were used in the fight. The wounded fell in heaps upon each side of the entrenchments, which had been hastily reared out of sand. The ground was drenched with the blood of the slain, until it seemed as if it had been washed by a sudden return of the tide.

Many deeds of valour were performed on either side, for both Britons and Romans fought with the utmost heroism. It chanced that once during the action Prince Nennius and Cæsar met face to face. The British Prince was overjoyed with the fate which gave him this opportunity. He felt that it would be an honour to strike even one blow at so great a man. He went boldly up to Cæsar and prepared to strike at him with his sword. But the Roman general was too quick for him. He stretched out his shield and parried the blow, then struck at Nennius with all his might with his drawn sword. He hit him upon the helmet, and the force of this blow was so great that the Prince staggered and nearly fell. Cæsar instantly prepared to strike another blow, which he hoped might prove mortal. He lifted his sword high above his head. Nennius saw what was happening, and held his shield up to receive the blow. Crash came Cæsar's sword, down upon the shield. The force of the blow was so great it pierced

14 Early British Heroes

right through the metal of the shield, and remained embedded in it. In triumph, Nennius seized it. He had gained the great Roman general's sword! He cared nothing for having been wounded. The Roman soldiers crowded round Cæsar, and prevented his being able to deal another blow. Nennius bore the sword away; all day he fought with it, dealing death with every stroke; for the sword was so powerful that it brought death to everyone who was wounded with it.

The whole day was occupied with the fight. For long it seemed doubtful which side would gain the victory. But towards evening the Britons gathered all their remaining strength, and fell upon the Romans with one great simultaneous rush. They were taken by surprise, and broke their line and fled back to their camp. They hastily gathered their belongings together, then went on board their ships, and by Cæsar's orders returned to Gaul.

Cassibellanus and the Britons returned solemn thanks to the gods for the triumph of this victory, which would enable them still to enjoy the inestimable benefit of freedom. The soldiers who had taken part in the battle were amply rewarded. Each one received a gift in proportion to the way in which he had distinguished himself. All the killed were buried, and prayers were said to

the gods on their behalf. Chief among the slain was Prince Nennius, who had died, shortly after the battle, from the wound which he had received from the hand of Cæsar. He was buried at Trinovantum, by the north gate of the city. His funeral obsequies were performed with regal pomp, and Cæsar's sword was buried in the tomb with him. On account of its great power, the people called it *Crocea Mors*, or *Yellow Death*, because, as they said, it had killed everyone whom it touched.

For two years the Britons lived in peace. Then news arrived from Gaul, that Julius Cæsar was intending to come again to Britain to revenge himself upon Cassibellanus. As soon as the Britons heard of this intention they did everything in their power to strengthen the country. They fortified the cities, and repaired the ruined walls, and placed armed men at all the different ports. They expected that the Roman fleet would come up the river Thames, as it had done before. Cassibellanus therefore caused iron, or leaden stakes, each as thick as a man's thigh, to be fixed under the surface of the water, so that the Roman ships might founder upon them. When this was done, Cassibellanus assembled all the forces of the island, and placed them near the sea-coast in readiness for Cæsar's coming.

They had not long to wait. As soon as

Cæsar had furnished himself with necessities for his vast army, he embarked; for he was very eager to revenge himself upon the people who had before defeated him. There is little doubt he would have done this, if he had been able to bring his fleet safely to land. But, owing to the preparations of the Britons, he was quite unable to do this.

Cæsar brought his fleet up the river Thames, just as the Britons had expected. The boats no sooner entered the river than they struck against the hidden staves. The sharp heads pierced the boats so that many of them immediately sank into the river. The Romans were quite unprepared for this catastrophe and had no idea what had happened. Before Cæsar had time to rally them, and give the order for retreat, a large part of his mighty army had been drowned.

Those that remained landed at the mouth of the river, where Cassibellanus was waiting to receive them. The British King was overjoyed with the success of his stratagem, as he thought it had caused the destruction of the Roman fleet.

The Britons gave the Romans no quarter. They attacked them at once with the utmost fury. But, in spite of their disabled condition, the Romans fought with great bravery. It was

Early British History

long before the British troops could make any headway against them. But so many of them had been drowned that the Romans far outnumbered them, and this began to tell as the fight wore on. At last, Cæsar saw that he could maintain his ground no longer, and ordered his men to take to their remaining ships. The wind stood fair, so they hoisted their sails and steered straight for the coast of Gaul.

Cassibellanus was greatly grieved at the loss of this second victory. The valour of the British nation had been able to put the conquerors of the world twice to flight! They had been ready to die for the defence of their country and their liberty, thus they had overcome him whom the whole world could not withstand! In honour of the event he summoned all the nobility and all the poorer people to come with their wives to Trinovantum, in order that they might perform a solemn sacrifice to the gods, who had aided them in this marvellous manner. Accordingly, all the people of Britain gathered together in the city of Trinovantum. A great variety of sacrifices were prepared. Forty thousand cows, a hundred thousand sheep, and all manner of fowls, too numerous to be numbered, besides thirty thousand wild beasts, were offered up as a thanksgiving to the gods.

As soon as these solemn rites were ended, the people gave themselves up to feasting and revelry. The mead cup was freely drunk. The people indulged in all kinds of sports, and various plays were performed. Now, it chanced that when the merry-making was at its highest, a wrestling match was arranged between two noble youths, Hirelglas, the nephew of the King, and Evelinus, nephew to Androgeus, the powerful Duke of Kent. Both youths were excited, and after the wrestling, a dispute arose between them as to which of them had been the victor. High words were followed by blows. Evelinus, mad with anger and excitement, snatched up his sword and cut off the head of his rival.

This quarrel led to very serious consequences. Cassibellanus commanded that Evelinus should atone with his life for this deed of treachery. Nothing but his blood, he said, could wipe away the stain of the death of Hirelglas.

This demand was opposed by Androgeus. He carried his nephew away, and hid him in one of the strongest castles in his dukedom, and utterly refused to give him up when ordered to do so by Cassibellanus.

The result of this was a quarrel between the Duke and the King. Cassibellanus was determined to punish this rebellion on the part of his

subje. He led an army into Kent and began to ravage the country. This humbled Androgeus, and he begged for mercy and pardon. But Cassibellanus was too angry to pay any attention. He could not forgive the Duke for resisting his authority. He felt that he deserved to lose his dukedom, and determined to take it from him. He was everywhere successful, and Androgeus saw his possession gradually passing away from him. At last, in despair, he resolved to ask assistance from Cæsar. He wrote him a letter, asking him to return to Britain and help him; promising as a reward for his assistance, to deliver the country into his hands.

"Androgeus, Duke of Trinovantum and Kent, to Caius Julius Cæsar." The letter ran. "Instead of wishing you death, as formerly, I now wish you health. I repent that I ever fought against you, when you made war against the King of this country. For he is so swollen with pride since his victory, that he is endeavouring to drive me from my dukedom, forgetful that it was I, who in a great measure, gained his victory for him. For without my help he could never have conquered you, Cæsar. I have preserved his kingdom for him, and now he endeavours to destroy me. I call the gods to witness, I have not deserved his anger! I have but guarded my

nephew, my own blood, from his wrath." He then goes on to tell Cæsar the cause of this quarrel with the King, after which he writes:—"I, therefore, fly to your clemency, Cæsar! I desire your assistance! I ask you to restore me to my dukedom, then through me, *you* shall gain possession of the island of Britain! Let no doubts or suspicion of treachery prevent you from accepting my offer! Remember a common motive now unites us! Enemies in the past, we shall be friends in the future! Our hatred for Cassibellanus will make us one! Our past defeats will spur us on to new victories!"

Cæsar was utterly taken by surprise when he received this letter. At first he thought of treachery, and looked upon the letter as a bait, sent by Cassibellanus to again lure him to Britain. He, therefore, sent an answer to Androgeus saying that he could not come to Britain, unless the Duke sent some hostages, as surety of his good faith. For it was impossible to undertake so great an enterprise upon the mere verbal word of one who, up till this time, had been his enemy.

Without any delay, Androgeus sent his son, Scœva, and thirty young noblemen of high birth to Rome, to remain as hostages of his good faith. Then, indeed, Cæsar believed in the truth of his

offer, and at once prepared a fleet with which to come to Britain. Before long he landed with his army at Rutupi, a port upon the south coast. He marched north towards Trinovantum, where it was arranged he should meet Androgeus. He stayed for a short time to rest at Canterbury, pitching his camp upon some open ground a short distance out of the town. Here he was surprised by Cassibellanus and a large British army, which had marched southwards to meet him.

Both armies began at once to fight, some using bows and arrows, and some swords. Much blood was shed on both sides, until the wounded fell down like leaves in autumn. It again seemed doubtful which side would win the day, but all at once Androgeus appeared upon the scene. He emerged from a wood, where he had been hiding, accompanied by a large force, and fell upon the rear of the British army. He had heard that Cassibellanus had gone to meet Cæsar, and had hastened from Trinovantum to render him assistance.

Cassibellanus was quite unprepared for this attack. He was completely surrounded by the Romans in front, and by his own countrymen in the rear. There was nothing that he could do. He knew that his men could not stand their

ground. The only thing to do was to give the order for retreat. Every soldier would be slain, did he strive to stay. Better to quit the field with broken forces, than to be utterly exterminated! A rocky hill stood near by, on the top of which was a thick wood of hazel trees. Cassibellanus determined to flee there with his men. With much exertion, they managed to reach the top, where they found a safe hiding among the trees.

Androgeus and the Romans pursued them all the way. Again and again they tried to disperse them. But it was useless. The rockiness of the hill and its great height gave the advantage to the Britons. The fact they were on higher ground enabled them to kill a large number of their enemy. All night the Romans tried to dislodge them, but without avail. They maintained their position, and when morning broke they were still unsubdued.

Cæsar and Androgeus now determined that they would besiege the mountain and starve Cassibellanus into subjection. They placed soldiers all round the hill, so that all avenues by which food could be sent to the Britons were entirely closed.

For several days the brave little force held out. They had neither food nor water, for



Cassibellanus in the mountains.

their stock of provisions was very scanty and was all exhausted during the first two days of the siege. Starvation stared them in the face. There was no hope of help reaching them from outside. The besiegers were too numerous, and too wary to make this possible. They were caught in a trap. It was impossible for them to get free. Their little band, weakened by starvation and exposure, could not cut its way through the enemies' ranks. They must either yield or die!

In this extremity Cassibellanus sent a message to Androgeus in which he humbly asked his pardon for the evil he had done to him and begged him to plead for him with Cæsar, and to arrange a peace between the British and Roman nations.

Three British envoys went down to the Roman camp, bearing a flag of truce. They sought out the tent of Androgeus and humbly delivered the message of the King.

At first Androgeus would not listen to them. "Ye gods of heaven and earth!" he said, "does my lord, the King condescend now to entreat *me*, whom before he did nothing but command? Does he desire to be reconciled to Cæsar? He ought to have considered all this *before*! I ought not to have been so unjustly treated!

The Prince who is mild in war, but in peace cruel as a lion, does not deserve to be loved!"

But after a time the mood of Androgeus changed. His anger cooled. He listened to the earnest request of the envoys, and promised to do all that he could to obtain peace. "I will procure peace for the King, if I can," he promised, "for the injury which he has done me is sufficiently revenged, now that he has come to me, and humbly sued for mercy."

Androgeus at once sought an interview with Cæsar. He had a difficult task to perform. He knew that it would not be an easy matter to do as he had promised, and induce the great Roman general to forgive his enemy, and grant peace to the nation he had been trying for so long to conquer. He went very carefully to work. He approached Cæsar in a most respectful manner. Saluting him, he humbly sought an interview.

When he had received the general's permission to speak he began:—"My Lord, have you not now sufficiently avenged yourself upon Cassibellanus and the British nation? Behold, they are entirely at your mercy! Now, I pray you, let clemency take the place of vengeance! What more is there to be done than to receive

the submission of the King, and cause the nation to pay tribute to the Roman state?"

Cæsar was very much astonished at this speech of Androgeus. He refused to think of his proposal. It was absurd, he said, to expect him to offer peace to his enemy now that he lay entirely in his power. It was not to be thought of! Androgeus must be mad to suggest such a course of action!

But Androgeus had no intention of giving in. He was not in the least daunted by Cæsar's displeasure. He listened patiently to all that he said, then very quietly went on:—"My whole engagement with you, Cæsar, was only to reduce Britain under your power, by the submission of Cassibellanus. Behold! Cassibellanus is now vanquished, and by *my assistance*, Britain is willing to become subject to you. I owe you no further service. My duty is now to my sovereign. The gods forbid that I should desert him, now that he comes to me and asks for pardon and for aid. It will be no easy matter for you, Cæsar, to overcome Cassibellanus while I have life. I will *never* allow him to be put to death, nor will I suffer him to be put in prison, or in chains. If you do not comply with my demands you will have to fight *me* as your enemy, as well as Cassibellanus. Take,

28 Early British Heroes

therefore, the peace that I offer, and accept the subjection of the British nation lest you lose all, by covetously desiring to obtain more!"

Cæsar was much moved by these threats of Androgeus. After some little time, he consented to enter into a peace with Cassibellanus. It was decided that the British nation should be under the protection of Rome, and should pay a yearly tribute of three thousand pounds of silver to the Roman state.

After this, Cæsar wintered in Britain, and he and Cassibellanus became firm friends, and made presents to each other.

When the winter was over, Cæsar returned to Gaul. He was quite content with the conquest he had made. He had forced this proud little nation to acknowledge the supremacy of the Roman power.

The Britons, on the other hand, felt that it was no disgrace to be subject to Rome, the great state which had conquered the whole world.



STORY II

The introduction of Christianity into Britain. Alban, the Pagan Prince, gives his life to save a preacher of the Gospel of Christ.

ONE great result of the connection between Britain and Rome was the introduction of Christianity into the island.

The faith of Jesus Christ was gradually spreading over the Roman Empire. Everywhere men and women put away their idols and began to worship God. The life and death of Christ was still fresh in the hearts of the people. A great awakening spread far and wide.

Confused rumours of this wonderful new religion reached the island of Britain. The people heard of a God, who was greater than Jupiter and Diana, or Bran the Blessed, the special god of the British people. The rumours were dim and vague, but a yearning to know more of this great and good God took possession

30 Early British Heroes

of the hearts of the British people. Lucius, the King, a wise and holy man, sent messengers to Rome, begging that teachers might be sent to Britain, to instruct himself and his people in the religion of Christ.

The teachers came and preached to the people. They read to them from the Bible, and taught them many things. The people accepted the teaching joyfully. They learnt of the life of Christ, and love for Him began to fill their hearts. First the King and the chief nobles were baptized, then most of the people, until there were very few in all the island who had not embraced the Christian faith. The heathen temples, which had been founded to the honour of many different gods, were pulled down, and in their places were built Christian churches. No more sacrifices were offered to the gods, for the people learnt that such things were useless. Gradually, they learnt that the only way in which they could serve God was to live rightly, and follow in the footsteps of the Christ, who pleased not Himself, but went about doing good.

For many years the Christian faith prospered in Britain. But, at last, trouble fell upon the little Church. The purging fire of persecution came to them to prove their faith and make them strong.

Diocletian, the Emperor of Rome, started a

terrible persecution of the Christians throughout his empire. He had become afraid of this new religion. It preached gentleness and mercy, and said that, in the sight of God, all men were equal. Diocletian loved power and pomp. He wanted to do many things which the Christians forbade as sinful. He determined that he would bring back the worship of the old gods. They had not cared how men lived. What they wanted was that sacrifices should be offered, and temples built in their honour. It was much easier to do this than to love your enemies, and to keep yourself unspotted from the world, which was what Christ asked from those who followed Him. Diocletian passed an edict that men should be forced to give up the Christian faith. All who refused to do so were to be burnt to death. He sent officers to the different provinces of the empire to enforce these commands, and a terrible suffering fell upon the Christian Churches.

In Britain the work of persecution was entrusted to Maximianus Herculius, a Roman general of great cruelty. He pulled down the churches, he collected all the copies of the Holy Scriptures that he could find, and burned them in the public markets. Worse than this, he put to death all those who refused to give up their faith. For there were many who felt that it was far better to die, than to be false to the Christ

they loved. They bore all manner of tortures bravely. Some were torn limb from limb, some were burnt, others were flayed alive. They hardly felt the suffering, for the joy of martyrdom filled their hearts. Their deaths were like bright lamps which, in that time of great darkness, kept the love of Christ from dying out of men's hearts. The greater the persecution, the more the Faith grew. The Roman general might tear down churches, but he *could not* alter the thoughts of one single human heart.

At this time there lived in Britain a certain nobleman called Alban. Unlike most of the British nobles, he had remained a Pagan, and had never accepted the Christian faith. He had been brought up to believe in Diana, Jupiter, and Minerva, and all the other gods of Rome, and he could not see any reason for changing his belief. He was a sincere Pagan, and the worship of the gods of his fathers meant very much to him. He could not easily give them up.

He was a good and upright man, noble in life and character. All men loved and respected him. The city of Verulam, over which he ruled, was one of the happiest and best governed in the land. All his followers were well cared for. No man ever came to Duke Alban to ask for help in vain. His charity was a by-word far and near. He was a Pagan, but Love dwelt in his

heart, and he was very near to God, although he did not know it.

No one felt more sorrowful than Alban at the persecution of the Christians. He was the chief Pagan in the land, but he utterly refused to aid the Roman general in his cruel work. Men could worship whom they pleased, he said. Who was he, that he should judge and kill his fellow-men?

One day, after a short absence in another part of the country, he went to the temple of Jupiter to offer a sacrifice to the god, as a thanksgiving for his safe return. He learnt from the chief priest that Maximianus Herculius had come to Verulam in his absence, and ordered a massacre of all the Christians. A strict search had been made, and already several men and women had been burnt.

Alban was deeply grieved to hear this news. His gentle heart hated all violence. He walked home pondering deeply. He wished earnestly that he could save these poor people. But he knew the power of the Roman general. It was useless to think that he, a poor British Prince, could withstand his will.

As he thought of these Christians, a great admiration filled Alban's heart. They all seemed ready to die rather than give up their faith.

34 Early British Heroes

How was it? Their love for their God must be very great. A half unconscious wish rose in Alban's heart that he too knew this God, for whom men and women were willing to die.

Pondering in this way he reached the palace gates. He gave the watchword and was about to enter, when he saw a poor old man crouching on the ground. He stooped and gently touched him on the shoulder. "Who art thou? And how can I help thee?" he said. "How is it that thou liest at my gate? What evil has befallen thee?"

It was some time before the stranger could answer these questions. He was utterly exhausted from fatigue and want of food. He lay upon the ground, gazing up at the Duke with dumb, beseeching eyes. He seemed like some poor, hunted animal. His breath came in quick, short pants, tears rolled down his withered cheeks. Alban waited very patiently, for his heart was full of pity for the poor, grief-stricken old man.

At last, the stranger spoke. "I am Amphibalus, the servant of Christ! A price has been placed upon my head! The Roman soldiers are searching for me, even now! They desire to take my life! I am a confessor, and a preacher, and many have been brought by me into the Christian faith. For this reason it has been

ordered that I should not be burnt, until I had been tortured. Lo, even while I talk with thee, Maximianus Herculus sits and plans the tortures that are to be inflicted on my poor flesh! One of his servants, a secret follower of Christ, gave me warning! He told me to fly from the country! But whither can I go? I am old and helpless! I have neither money nor friends! At first, I thought it was useless to try to escape! I would stay and trust in the mercy of God! But though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. All night I dreamt of tortures, and in the morning I thought I would come to thee. Thou art a Pagan, but thy justice and thy mercy are a watchword among men. I pray thee to help me, and may my God, who rules the heaven and the earth, reward thee, and teach thee to know Himself!"

The old man sank back exhausted. The effort of speaking had used up his little remaining strength. Alban saw that he had fainted. He took him up in his arms and carried him to his private chamber. He placed him to rest upon his own couch, and fed and tended him until his strength slowly returned.

No sooner did Amphibalus regain consciousness than he once more begged the Duke to take pity upon him, and help him to escape. "Father, fear nothing," Alban answered, "I

36 Early British Heroes

will help thee! Thou shalt be saved, even if the price that has to be paid be my own life!"

Amphibalus knew, as he looked at Alban, that what he said was true. He *would* save him, let the cost be what it might.

They talked together for some time as to how Amphibalus could most easily escape. After much thought, it was arranged that he should go to the Duke's brother. He lived upon the sea coast, and would arrange to send him to some place of safety across the seas.

There was no time to lose, the Roman general might arrive at any moment to search for his prey. Alban took off the preacher's garb, which Amphibalus wore, and dressed him in his own princely clothes. He called three of his most trusty servants and told them to take Amphibalus to his brother's castle. "Remember, I place his life in your care," he said, "I charge you, as you value your own lives, to guard him! If any evil should befall him, think not to obtain pardon from me! Therefore, look to it, how you fulfil my trust! Use all care, and never leave him, while life remains with you!"

He turned to Amphibalus and embraced him tenderly. "Take this letter to my brother. He will shield thee for my sake, and send thee to

some place of safety. I will remain here and prevent the Roman guard from following thee. Now, Father, depart in peace, and may the gods shield thee!"

Amphibalus fell at the Duke's feet. He seized his hands and covered them with kisses. "The great God will reward thee, my son! I would that thou didst know the love of Christ! One so good and brave as thou art should not be a Pagan. Take this scroll. It is all I have to give thee, but it is more precious than untold gold. Read it, and may the Christ Himself come into thy heart. I leave thee in God's hands, my son. I have no fear for thee. Something within me tells me that thou art not far from the Kingdom of Heaven." The old man remained for a few minutes silent. His lips moved, but no visible words came. His whole soul rose in a prayer that his God would bless the man who was saving his life.

"Farewell, my son, may God reward thee," were the last words of the old man, as the Duke's three servants led him away.

Alban was greatly moved. For some time he stood quite motionless, still holding in his hand the scroll which Amphibalus had given to him. The words of the preacher had made a deep impression upon his mind. What meant he by

38 Early British Heroes

the Kingdom of Heaven? Who was this Christ, that all men talked of? He had heard He was a simple carpenter's son. How, then, was it possible that He could be a god? The gods were great and terrible! They needed constant sacrifices to appease their wrath! They cared little or nothing for the sons of men! But Amphibalus had spoken of Love, and a Christ who died to save His fellow-men! What did it all mean? In deep perplexity Alban sat down and began to read. He would see what the scroll had to tell him of this new, strange God. Hour after hour he sat. The night came on, but he did not heed it. He lighted his lamp and still sat poring over the ancient scroll. Hunger and fatigue were alike forgotten. All the needs of the body were unheeded. A great revelation had come to Alban's soul. He was like one born blind, who suddenly sees.

The scroll which Amphibalus had left with Alban was the Gospel of St John. He read of the life of Christ, and all its beauty entered into his very soul. In the dim hours of the early morning he got up from his desk and walked to his private oratory. The images of Diana and Jupiter were there, as well as those of many other gods and goddesses. In one corner was incense, and all the things necessary for offering

sacrifices. Very quietly Alban took the gods and goddesses down from their different shrines. He put them all together in one corner of the room. He took the incense, and other sacrificial accessories, and threw them into the fire which was always kept burning in the oratory. When this was done, he knelt down and prayed that God would help him. "Oh God, I know that Thou art great and good, teach me," he said. "Help me to live the life of Christ, Thy Son! Let me, if it be Thy will, give my life for Thee, even as He did!"

Scarcely an hour passed before Maximianus Herculus arrived at the castle with a band of Roman soldiers. He demanded the instant surrender of Amphibalus.

"He has been traced to thy castle," Maximianus said. "We know that thou art a Pagan, and are loath to doubt thy loyalty, but dost thou fail to deliver Amphibalus into my hands, thou art the enemy of Rome. For he who shields a traitor is himself a traitor! What sayest thou? Wilt thou deliver the preacher? or wilt thou pay the penalty of thy refusal?"

There was no hesitation in the answer which Alban gave. He had no fear; his whole manner was triumphant, as he stood and faced the Roman general and his blood-thirsty band of soldiers.

A glad light rested upon his noble face. The joy of perfect conquest over himself gave him a divine beauty. Proudly he spoke:—"Maximianus Herculus, ambassador of Rome. I heed nothing of thy threats. Thou canst hurt my body, but thou canst not hurt my soul. Amphibalus, whom thou seekest, is not here. By my help he has escaped to a place of safety, where thy treachery cannot reach him. I stand here to take his place, and I thank God that I am accounted worthy to die instead of the servant of Christ. You call me Pagan; and so I was, in my blind ignorance and folly. But God in His mercy has revealed Himself to me. Behold, I am His servant! The follower of the Lord Christ Jesus!"

"Seize him, seize him," Maximianus cried. "He shall pay for his blasphemy with his life!"

They bore him away. He was bound to the stake which had been prepared for Amphibalus; the piled-up faggots were lighted, and slowly the fire did its work.

But we must not think of the torture, nor of the cruel flames which ate his life away. No, let us think instead of his beautiful spirit of love and sacrifice. We can be sure that no sorrow rested in Alban's heart. I do not think he ever felt the pain of his awful death. The gladness

Early British Heroes 41

which filled his heart lifted him above all pain. He laid down his life willingly—nay, joyfully, even as Christ laid down His.

It is for this that we remember him. Men loved him and called him saint. The name of the town he lived in was changed from Verulam to St Albans. A great church and also a monastery were built there in his memory, and many learnt to love God through him.

He that loseth his life shall find it. Saint Alban was great because he forgot himself. In him dwelt the spirit of loving self-surrender which is the salvation of the world.



STORY III

The coming of the Saxons. They are invited to Britain by Vortigern, a British prince, whose treachery causes his country's ruin.

[NOTE.—In reading this account of the coming of the Saxons to Britain, we must again remember that Geoffrey of Monmouth's great idea was to glorify the Britons, and heap indignity upon the Saxons. It is quite true that Hengist and Horsa, and their Saxon followers, were first invited to Britain by the British King, to aid him in fighting against the Picts. It is also true that the Saxons artfully contrived to arrange that more and more of their countrymen should come and settle in Britain. But Geoffrey has without doubt coloured their conduct with a far darker dye than it deserves. The Saxons did *not* gain their power in Britain solely by treachery, as he makes out. That he does so is due to the hatred which he felt, in common with all the Celts, to the nation who had driven his ancestors, the Britons, from their original home.]

THE time had now come when a new enemy was to disturb the peace of Britain. The Saxons, ever

the bitter foe of the Celtic race, landed upon her shores; and the first dim shadow of the fate which was to overtake them fell upon the British people.

Vortigern, a deceitful and wicked stranger, ruled the land. He had seized the throne by stealth; having caused the death of Constans, the true King, by a deed of the utmost treachery. The heirs to the throne, Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther Pendragon, the brothers of the slaughtered King, fled to Brittany, in fear of losing their lives. Britain was left a prey to all her enemies, with no one, but the faithless Vortigern, to guard her honour.

The chief of these enemies were the Picts, a fierce and warlike people, who had come across the North Sea and settled in that part of Britain which we now call Scotland. The Picts had helped Vortigern to slay King Constans, for in this way they hoped to gain power in Britain. But Vortigern was afraid of the Picts, and no sooner had he got the throne, than he banished all of them from Britain, and quite refused to give them the rewards they expected. This conduct greatly enraged the Picts. They sent messengers to Dacia and Norway, asking the Kings of those countries to join with them in attacking Britain, and before many months had passed, they had a large army in readiness.

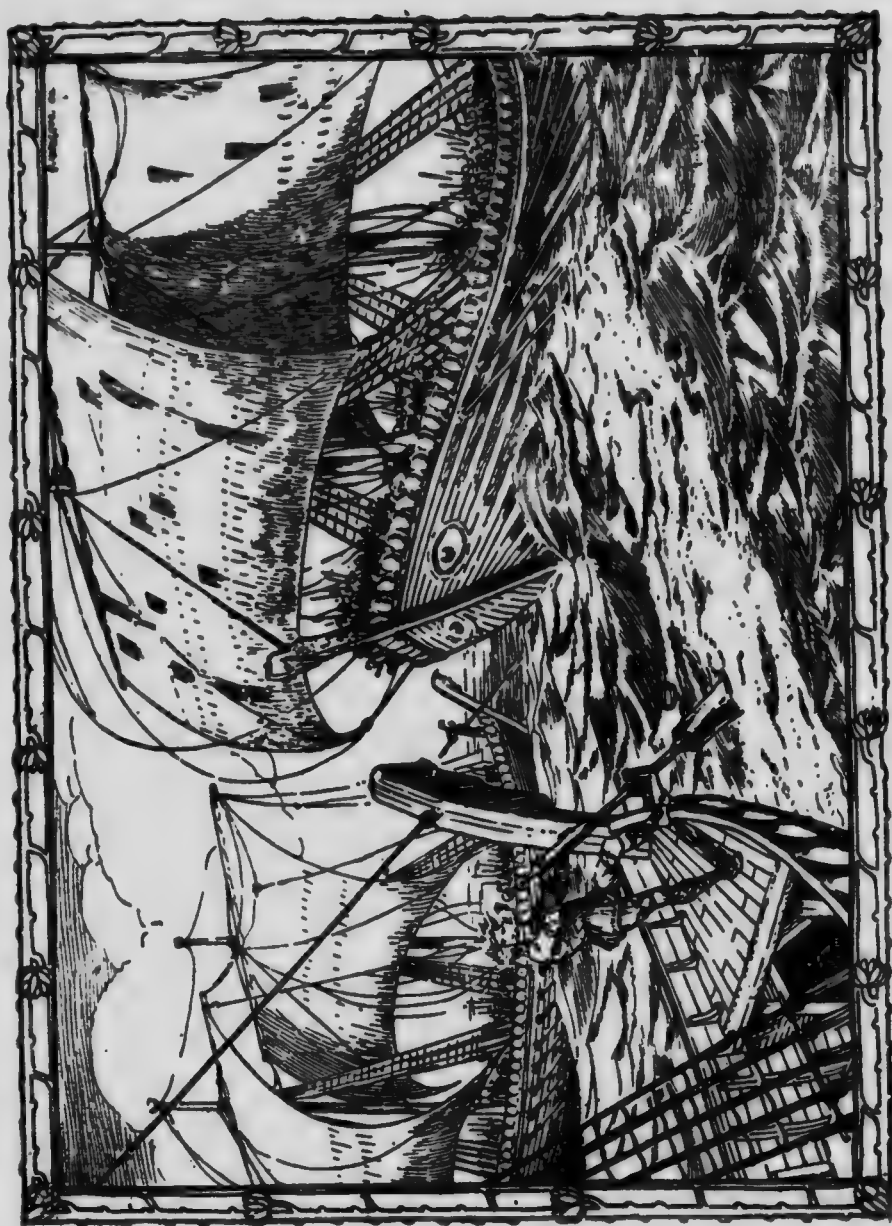
44 Early British Heroes

Nor were the Picts the only enemy that Vortigern had to fear. It was not long before he heard that the King of Brittany was preparing an army to drive him from the throne. For he wished to help Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther Pendragon, the banished British princes, who were living at his court.

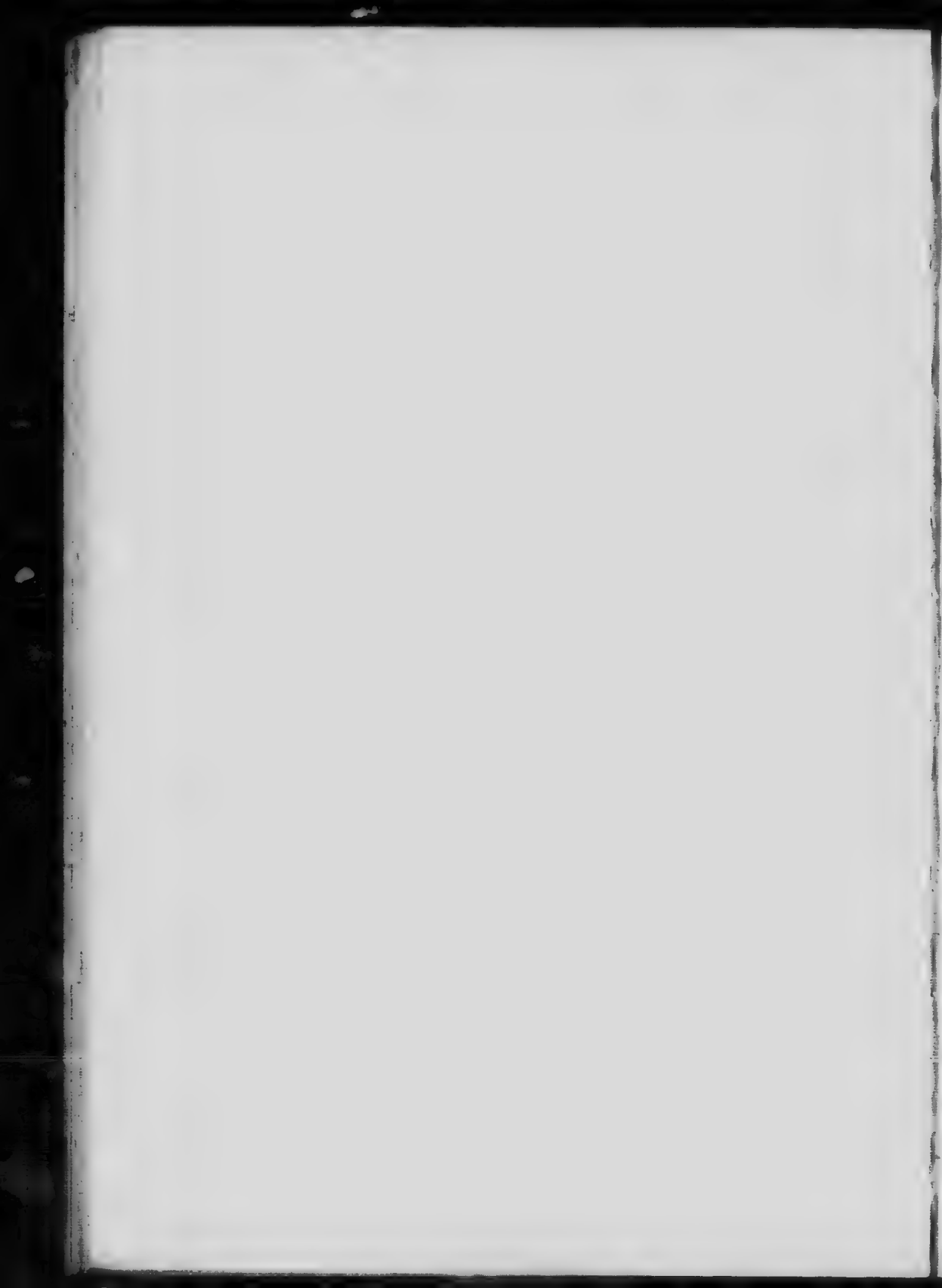
Vortigern was in great distress. Like all tyrants he was a coward. The Picts had already entered the northern part of Britain. Everywhere they were victorious. The men he sent against them were entirely overpowered. They were all slain or taken prisoners.

Vortigern was in the south collecting new forces, with which to march to meet the Picts. But he was so paralysed with fear that he did little, and each day his situation grew more perilous. There seemed little doubt that the Picts would soon conquer the whole country.

Just at this time the news reached Vortigern that three brigandines, or long galleys, full of armed men, had landed on the coast of Kent. The strangers had come from over the seas. They were commanded by two brothers, Hengist and Horsa, who sent word that they had come peaceably, and asked that a treaty of good fellowship might be formed between themselves and the British King. Like a drowning man, Vorti-



Coming of Hengist and Horsa



gern was ready to catch at any straw, which might possibly help him in his distress. He sent orders that the strangers should be hospitably received, and at once conducted into his presence.

The King was staying at Dorobernia, or, as it is now called, Canterbury, and it was not long before the strangers stood before him. He was greatly struck with their strength, for they were tall men who gave the idea of great power. Vortigern carefully viewed the whole company, then he asked them from what country they came, and what had been the reason which had brought them to his kingdom.

Hengist, the elder of the two brothers, at once stepped forward and made the following answer: "Most noble King, Saxony, which is one of the countries of Germany, is the place of our birth. The reason that we have come to your country is to offer you our services. We will fight for you and help you to overcome your enemies. We left our native country because the laws of our land required that we should do so. It is the custom amongst us that when our country becomes overstocked with people, the strongest and ablest of our youths go to some new country beyond the seas, to find a fresh home among strange people. This, then, is the reason of our being here. Our country was overcrowded, so

48 Early British Heroes

we were chosen to go forth. We put out to sea, and by the guidance of our god Mercury, we arrived at your kingdom."

When Vortigern heard the name of Mercury, he looked earnestly upon the strangers and asked them what religion they believed in.

Without a moment's delay Hengist replied, "We worship Saturn and Jupiter and the other gods who govern the world, and especially Mercury, whom in our language we call Woden. Our ancestors consecrated the fourth day of the week to his memory, and called it Wednesday in his honour. Next to him we worship the powerful goddess Frea, to whom we have dedicated the sixth day, which we call Friday.

Hengist would have continued to say more about their gods, and their manner of worship, but Vortigern interrupted him, "I am much grieved at your ignorance," he said, "which causes you to worship these heathen gods and goddesses, instead of the God of heaven." He then went on to tell them how pleased he was that they had come, and how gladly he would avail himself of their offered help.

"I know not whether you come by God's guidance, or by some other agency," he said, "but your coming is most helpful to me. I am in great difficulties, for my enemies oppress me on every side. If, therefore, you will fight

for me and help me in my wars, I will entertain you honourably in my kingdom, and you shall find a home in this country. Behold, I will bestow land upon you, and many other possessions!"

The barbarians, or to call them by their right name the Saxons, eagerly accepted this offer. An agreement was drawn up, and signed by themselves and the King, and they took up their residence at the British Court.

Thus the Saxons came to Britain; brought there through the wickedness of Vortigern. Alas, for the unhappy country! Alas, for the Celtic race! These strangers, who came as friends, would prove her bitterest foe. They would wrest the country, the great Brutus had founded, from the British people. They would drive them forth, desolate and homeless, like sheep without a shepherd.

But Vortigern neither knew nor cared for any of these things. All he thought of was that the Saxons would help him to overcome the enemies who threatened his throne.

The Britons and Saxons met the Picts upon the banks of the river Humber. It did not take long to decide the fate of the battle. In a very short time the Picts were utterly routed, and had to take safety in flight. The victory

was chiefly due to the Saxons. They fought with the utmost bravery ; indeed, their attack upon the Picts was so fierce that there was very little left for the Britons to do.

Vortigern was overjoyed at the downfall of his enemy. He felt that he owed the victory to the Saxons, so he at once began to give them many presents. He gave Hengist and Horsa large possessions of land in Lindesia, or Lincoln, where they could live with their fellow-soldiers.

The Saxon chiefs were not slow to take advantage of the King's kindness. Hengist was a crafty man, with a very clever mind. He and his followers had found a very bountiful home in the island of Britain, and already visions of conquering this fertile country had begun to fill his mind. His great desire was to obtain more power. He knew the weakness of Vortigern, and determined to use it for his own advantage.

One day, not long after the conquest of the Picts, he went to him, and said, "Sir, your enemies give you disturbance from all quarters, and few of your subjects love you. You are threatened on every side. Even now the King of Brittany is coming to dethrone you, and make Aurelius Ambrosius King. Not one of your subjects will oppose him. They will be glad

to see your downfall. If it please you, therefore, my lord, let me send to our country to invite over some more of our soldiers, so that we may be more powerful to help you, and better able to overcome all your enemies."

Vortigern was entirely overcome by the craftiness of this speech. He forgot that the soldiers who could fight *for* him could also fight *against* him. "Send your messengers to Germany and invite over whom you please," he said. Indeed, he was so foolish, and so little did he realise the plans that Hengist was forming, that he went on to say, "Ask from me whatever you desire, I promise you shall have no refusal!"

Hengist with a low bow returned him thanks, and said, "My lord and King, you have given me great possessions in land and houses, but you have not yet made me a consul or prince or given to me any town or city over which I can rule."

Sorrowfully King Vortigern answered:—

"Alas, you ask from me that which is impossible. You are a stranger and a pagan, my nobility would never allow me to bestow upon you the dignity of a British nobleman."

Very humbly Hengist replied:—

"Give your servant, then, only as much ground as he can encompass with a leather thong! Let

me build a fortress there so that I may have some place to which I can go, in case of need. Do not fear to grant this request, my lord, for I will always be faithful to you, even as I have been hitherto. I do not think of myself in asking this; my only desire is to serve you, my King!"

The foolish Vortigern was more taken in than ever. He believed all the flattering speeches of the Saxon Prince, and gladly gave him what he asked.

Hengist took a bull's hide and cut it up into very narrow strips. He joined the pieces together and made one long thong, with which he encompassed a rocky place, which he had carefully chosen on account of its great strength. Here he built a castle, which was called Than-caster, or Thong Castle. It is situated about twenty-three miles from Lincoln, and is now called Caistor.

Meanwhile the messengers came back from Germany with eighteen ships, full of the bravest and best of the Saxon soldiers. They also brought Hengist's daughter Rowan, who was one of the greatest beauties of the day. She had come by Hengist's special command, for he hoped, by her help, to gain still further power over the British King.

As soon as the ships arrived Hengist invited the King to come to a banquet, in order that he might receive the homage of his new subjects. When he was seated at the table, the Princess Rowan came towards him, bearing a golden cup, full of sparkling wine. She made a low courtesy, and said, in a voice which sounded like sweet music, "Lauerd King, wacht heil!"

"What does she say?" the King eagerly asked his interpreter, for he was greatly struck with the young girl's beauty.

"She called you 'Lord King'!" the interpreter answered, "and she asked you to permit her to drink your health. If it pleases you, you must go to her and answer her, and say, 'Drinc heil, maiden!'"

Vortigern at once did as his interpreter told him. He went up to the Princess and said, "Drinc heil, maiden!" And, when she had done this, he took the cup from her hand, and kissed her, and drank himself.

After this everything happened as Hengist desired. Vortigern could think of nothing but the beauty of the fair Saxon princess. Before many days had passed he went to Hengist and asked him to give him his daughter as his bride. He was so foolish that he promised to give up the dukedom of Kent into the hands of Hengist,

54 Early British Heroes

if only he would allow him to marry the Princess Rowan.

From that day Vortigern became a mere tool in the hands of the Saxons. He did everything that Hengist commanded him. Day by day the foreigners got more power. Hengist's two brothers, Octa and Ebrissa, came over with three hundred ships, filled with soldiers. Nor were these all who came. Scarcely a month went by that fresh troops of Saxons did not land from Germany and take up their abode in Britain.

As time went on the British people became alarmed at what was happening. They feared this vast number of foreigners who were flooding their country. The King's marriage with the Princess Rowan had greatly displeased them. She was a pagan and a stranger, it was not fitting that she should be Queen of Britain!

The chief nobles went to Vortigern and begged him to dismiss the Saxons from the Court. They told him how dangerous it was to allow foreigners to obtain so much power. "Our country is no longer ours," they cried, "you have delivered it into these strangers' hands!"

But Vortigern would not listen to their pleadings. He did everything that Queen Rowan asked him; for her sake, he showed more and more favour to the Saxons. At last the British

people determined that they would no longer serve a King who so utterly forgot his duty to his people and his country. With one accord they rose against him, and made his son, Vortimer, the King.

Vortimer was utterly unlike his father. He had been born many years ago. His mother was a British princess, who had been Vortigern's first wife. She was a good and holy woman and had given all her life to training her son well. Vortimer loved his country and it grieved him to see these Saxon foreigners taking possession of the land. He determined to drive them out. Britain should once more belong to the British people.

He gathered all his forces together and went against the Saxons. He inspired the British soldiers with his own courage until they were everywhere successful. They overcame the Saxons in four great battles.

The first was fought upon the River Darent, near the spot where the modern village of Dartford stands. In the second battle, which was fought near Epsford, Horsa and Catigern, the brother of Vortimer met in single combat, and were both slain. This event is remembered by a remarkable monument, known as Kit Cotty's House, which is said to mark the grave of

56 Early British Heroes

Catigern. The third fight took place upon the seashore, when the Saxons were shamefully vanquished, and had to take refuge in the Isle of Thanet. Here Vortimer besieged them, and the last battle was fought, after which the Saxons departed in their long galleys, and went back to Germany.

For some years everything went well. Vortimer ruled the country wisely, and the old prosperity came back to Britain. But this happy state of things was not to continue. Queen Rowan had stayed in Britain, and day by day she planned as to how she could cause the death of good King Vortimer and bring her people back. For long she could not succeed. Everyone loved Vortimer, and she could induce no one to rise against him. But at last she contrived to bribe one of his servants, by promising him large rewards and high honours, if he would cause the King's death. She gave him a poisonous draught, which he was to give to Vortimer. The good King drank it, and was at once seized with a sudden sickness from which he almost immediately died.

In his last moments he thought of his people. He called the chief nobles to him and implored them to resist the Saxons. "Be brave and fight for the country of your fathers," he said,

"remember our great ancestor Brutus. Shall the race that he founded let their country be torn from them, and given to the heathen stranger? Be men, and Britons! Fight for your children, and your country, and your God!"

But it was useless. His brave words had no effect. There was no one to lead the British people. The nobles, instead of thinking of their country, fought and quarrelled among themselves as to who should wear the crown.

In the meantime Vortigern and Rowan seized the palace and got all the power into their own hands. Queen Rowan at once sent messengers to Germany to tell her father what had happened and urge him to come at once to Britain.

"The whole country is open to you," she wrote. "Vortigern will do my bidding. There is nothing to oppose your taking entire possession of Britain!"

Hengist did not delay. He raised an army of three hundred thousand men and at once embarked and sailed for Britain.

The arrival of the Saxons filled the British people with alarm. The nobles stopped their quarrellings and at once began to make preparations to drive them out of Britain. Even Vortigern was alarmed. Nothing that Queen Rowan said could reassure him. He would have been

58 Early British Heroes

glad to welcome Hengist with a small force, he said, but he would not receive this vast multitude of foreigners.

Queen Rowan at once sent messengers to her father to tell him the state of affairs. "You must think of some plan and act quickly," she said. "Vortigern will no longer listen to me. You must do something to secure his friendship. He is already consulting with the nobles, and they are preparing an army to drive you out of the kingdom."

Hengist did not lose any time in following his daughter's advice. He was determined to succeed in his design of conquering Britain. He thought of many stratagems, but at last decided that the best way of imposing upon the British people would be to make a show of peace. He at once sent ambassadors to Vortigern to declare to him and the British nobles his reason for bringing so great a number of men. "Tell the King," he said to the ambassadors, "I did not bring my soldiers to offer any violence to this country. Nor do I desire that they should stay, unless it is his will that they should do so. The reason that I brought them was I thought that Vortimer was still alive, and I should need my soldiers to fight against him. Now that he is dead, I

have no further need of them, and I will do with them whatsoever the King and his nobles desire. Those of my soldiers whom they wish to stay shall remain in Britain, the rest shall immediately return to Germany."

Hengist further commanded his ambassadors to arrange a place of meeting between the Saxons and the Britons, where this decision with regard to the soldiers might be made. It was to be a meeting of peace and friendship. Both sides were to come unarmed, and the Saxons would pledge themselves to do whatsoever the Britons should decide.

Not only Vortigern, but all the British nobles were deceived by this message. They consented to do everything that Hengist desired. A great meeting was arranged between the Britons and the Saxons, which was to take place at Ambresbury, or Salisbury, on the Kalends of May.

The Saxon chief was overjoyed when he heard from the ambassadors of the success of his plans. He at once began making preparations for the meeting. He carefully instructed his followers as to the part they were to play. They were to go outwardly unarmed, but each man was to carry a long dagger, carefully concealed beneath his garments. He told them

that they were to meet the Britons with signs of peace and goodwill and friendship. In this way they would do away with the suspicion of treachery which the Britons might have. He further told them that during the conference he would give them a signal, which was to be these words: "Nemet oure Saxas." The moment they heard these words they were to be ready. Each man was boldly to stab the Briton who was next him, and stab him in his hidden danger.

The day of meeting drew near. British and Saxons met at the appointed place. No one among the Britons guessed the treachery of the Saxon leader. The two parties began to treat of peace and words of goodwill and friendship passed on either side. The terms of a treaty which was to be signed by both Vortigern and Hengist had been drawn up. There was a short pause. This gave Hengist the opportunity he had been looking for. Without one word of warning, he called out the given signal, "Nemet oure Saxas, Nemet oure Saxas!"

Every Saxon drew forth his hidden dagger and fell upon a British prince. Hengist himself seized Vortigern, the King, and held him by his cloak. The Britons were completely off their guard. They had no thought of treachery, and

had come to the meeting-place unarmed. But in spite of this, they did not yield without a struggle. They seized clubs, or stones, or anything that they could pick up from the ground, and with these killed and wounded a great many of the traitors.

Einion, consul of Gloucester, fought with especial valour. He took up a stake, which he happened to find, and with it made an heroic defence against the treacherous Saxons. Every blow of his stake carried death along with it. The story runs, that with this simple weapon he killed no less than seventy men.

But bravely as they fought, the Britons were bound to be overcome. They killed many of the Saxons, but in the end they were utterly vanquished. They were all killed or taken prisoners.

The detestable traitors, if had been triumph, was amply paid at the mercy.

Nor was it long before the Saxons did not let him. They bound him in chains and threatened him with death, unless he at once delivered all the fortified places of the land into their keeping. No less of a coward now than he had been all his life, he consented

to do as they desired. To gain his own life and liberty he gladly played the traitor to his country. He denied the Saxons nothing, but did whatever they commanded him.

The Saxons marched first to London, as Trinovantum was now called. They took the city, then afterwards went to York, Lincoln and Winchester, and all the principal cities in the land. As they marched along, they wasted the country through which they passed. They destroyed the people, just in the same way as wolves devour sheep, when they are left by their shepherds. There was no one to help the poor British people. The nobles were slain, Vortigern thought of no one but himself, and for safety fled to the mountainous parts of Kambria. No hand was raised to stay the cruel march of the Saxon. Desolation fell upon the island of Britain. The pagan foreigner reigned triumphant.



STORY IV

The marvellous life of the Prophet Merlin. He relates the future to Vortigern ; brings the Giant's Dance to England, and does many wonderful things.

[NOTE.—We do not know whether such a person as the Prophet Merlin ever really lived. We find his name in all the old Celtic myths. It was from these old stories that Geoffrey of Monmouth took his account of him. The story of his birth is a very old one. In ancient days everyone seemed to believe that he had an evil spirit for his father. Nothing was too wonderful for him to do. All kinds of stories sprang up about him. The bringing of the Giant's Dance from Ireland is only one of many strange things which he is said to have done. His name is always connected with that of Arthur, the great hero of the British race. He foretold the birth of Arthur, he trained and guided him in his early childhood, and when he became King, helped him throughout his reign. When Arthur died and the Saxons came and took the land Merlin went mad with grief, and soon after died. For in these old stories we do not hear anything about the enchantress Vivian. Tennyson and other later writers, whom you will read some day, make Merlin's

ruin and death due to her. But the old stories do not even mention her name.

Many books have been written about Merlin. The first of the old romances which spring up after Geoffrey's Chronicle was written, was an account of his birth and life. It was called "The Romance of Merlin," and was written by a great Frenchman called Robert de Borron. It is very interesting, and tells even more strange stories about the Prophet than Geoffrey's Chronicle.]

For some months Vortigern stayed among the mountains of Kambria. He was very frightened, as he always feared that the Saxons were coming against him. He did not care about the unhappy state of Britain, all he cared about was his own safety. He thought of nothing all day long but of himself and his own peril. He spent all his time in planning ways of escape, in case the Saxons should come and fight with him. At last he determined that he would build a very strong tower, into which he could go if any danger threatened him.

He marched all through Kambria to find the best and safest place. After much searching, he decided upon a small hollow, near the top of Mount Eir, or, to give it its modern name, Snowdon. The way up to this hollow was very steep and stony, for the mountain was the highest in all Kambria. Vortigern thought he would be perfectly safe if he built his tower here. No

Saxon would be able to reach him, and he would be free from all his enemies.

He commanded all the workmen of Kambria to come to Mount Eir to build the tower. The builders came, and at once began to lay the foundations for the building. But, strange to say, whatever they did one day, the earth swallowed up the next. The stones they laid down with great skill and care completely disappeared before twenty-four hours passed. Again and again they tried. It was always the same. Their work was always wasted. The earth sucked in all that they did.

At last the workmen grew frightened. They thought that the evil spirits must be the cause of their misfortune. It was the evil one, they said, who destroyed their work. They went to Vortigern and told him what had happened. They all refused to have anything more to do with building the tower. It was useless, they told him, to try and work against fate.

Vortigern was very frightened. Like everyone else in those days, he believed that there were good and evil spirits who helped or hindered the lives of men. To have the evil spirits angry with him was worse than any mortal enemy. In great fear, he sent for all the magicians, or wise men of the land, and asked them what this awful thing meant.

66 Early British Heroes

Now the magicians were not really very much wiser than other people. They did not know, any more than Vortigern or the workmen, why the foundations of the tower always sank into the ground. But they did not like to say so. They were supposed to be very wise, and to know everything. They knew that all their power would be gone if they told the truth, and owned that they knew nothing about the matter. They felt that they had to say something. They consulted together, then came to Vortigern and gravely shook their heads, and looked very wise indeed.

"O King," they said, "this is, in truth, a very terrible and awful thing. It will need all the power and art of magic to undo this great evil. Lo! you must search far and near, until you find a youth who has an evil spirit for his father. You must take him and kill him and sprinkle his blood upon the stones and cement of the foundations of the tower. They will then become firm, and cease to sink into the ground. This is the way, O King; in no other manner can you stay the power of the evil spirits who are causing this work of darkness."

Vortigern was very much disturbed when he heard this speech of the magicians. He never thought of doubting their word. The idea that they were making up a foolish story, because

they did not know what to say, never occurred to him. The words of the magicians were law and gospel to all the Celtic people. He felt that he must do what the wise men said. But how was he ever to find a youth, who had an evil spirit for his father?

He sent messengers all over the land. Far and wide they went, but nowhere could they find such a lad. At last the messengers grew quite hopeless, and made up their minds to return to Vortigern and tell him the search was useless.

As they were coming back to Kambria they passed through a certain village, and being very weary, they stayed for a time to rest. It chanced that while they were resting, they overheard a quarrel between two lads, who were fighting upon the village green. The fight was over, but the youths were still quarrelling. For some time the messengers did not hear what they were saying, but all at once they heard the elder of the two boys say, "No, I won't fight with you again. It is a disgrace for me to fight with you! There is no equality between us. My father and mother both belong to the royal race; but no one knows who your father was! You belong to the evil spirits! Your father was——"

The messengers did not wait to hear any more. They were overjoyed with the discovery they had made. It seemed as if they had at last found

68 Early British Heroes

what they had been seeking for so long. They at once began to make enquiries from the bystanders as to who this boy was. They eagerly asked why his companion had said he belonged to the evil spirits.

They soon learnt all that there was to know about the youth. Everyone knew him and was anxious to tell his history to the messengers. They learnt that his name was Merlin; that his mother was the daughter of the King of Dimietia, and that his father had been no earthly man, but an evil spirit.

"He is possessed of great power," one of the bystanders said. "Yes, he was sent into the world by the evil spirits to do harm to men," another one went on, "but his mother, who is a good and holy woman, had him baptized and signed with the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, as soon as he was born."

They then went on to say, that in this way the wicked will of the evil spirits had been set aside. Signing him with the cross of Christ had made him the child of God, instead of the child of the evil spirits. But in spite of this he was not a natural boy, and the village people shook their heads. "Leave him alone, do not have anything to do with him," was what they advised the messengers, "he is not like other boys, he has a double nature; he knows the

past from the evil ones, and the future from God."

The messengers quite believed all this strange story. It did not seem foolish and impossible to them. In those days there were many strange fables of evil spirits, who took the shape of men, and came to live upon the earth. They never doubted that Merlin was really the son of one of these evil ones. They went to him and told him he must come with them to Kambria, as Vortigern, the King, desired to see him.

Merlin was very flattered to think he was wanted by so great a person as the King. He went with the messengers willingly enough, and without waiting to ask any questions. But as they journeyed, he desired them to tell him why he was wanted by the King.

He then learnt the story of the sinking foundations, and how the magicians had said that the only way in which the tower could be built was to sprinkle the building with the blood of a youth who had an evil spirit for his father.

"Then, that is why you want me," Merlin said, "to shed my blood and sprinkle it upon the stones."

He did not say any more for some time, but rode on thinking very deeply. All at once he smiled, a strange, queer smile for a boy's face to

wear. Then he began to mutter, more to himself than to the messengers, "Ah, who knows, perchance I may be more useful to the King living, than I could be dead!"

He did not speak again, until they reached the foot of Mount Erir. He then asked the messengers to show him the place, where the tower was to be built. At first they refused. They did not want to climb the mountain, and said it would only be a useless delay, but Merlin begged so earnestly, that at last they consented. In truth, they were half afraid of the lad. "If he has an evil spirit for his father, we had best humour him and do as he asks," they said; "who knows, if we refuse him, what evil may happen to us?"

They took Merlin up the steep, rocky sides of Mount Erir, and showed him the hollow where the foundations of the tower had been laid. There they waited, while he went down and carefully examined the place.

"The youth is mad!" they cried, as they saw him lying flat down on the ground and tapping it with a sharp stone, then putting his ear to the place as if listening intently.

"He is calling to his father!" one of the messengers said, and their faces grew pale with fear.

"Come away, come away!" said another, and without waiting for Merlin, they began quickly to descend the mountain side.

It was not long before he overtook them. His face wore the same queer smile that it had done before. He said nothing, and in perfect silence went with the messengers into the presence of the King.

News had already reached the castle of their arrival. Vortigern was waiting for Merlin with all the magicians gathered around him. The wise men were very frightened. They were much surprised to hear that the search had been successful, and that the messengers had found a youth who had an evil spirit for his father. They were in great alarm, for they knew very well that his blood would never prevent the tower from sinking. But they did not dare to show their fear. They spent their time in thinking what story they could make up in order to get out of this dreadful difficulty.

Mangantius, the oldest and wisest of them all, went up to Merlin, at the King's command, and told him all that had happened. "Child of the evil one," he said, and his loud voice sounded very harsh and cruel, "prepare to die! Thy blood is needed to stay the evil spell! Thy young life must be given back to those from

whom it came! Then shall evil cease to trouble the King! Then will the Tower of Safety be able to be built!"

Merlin listened attentively to all that the magician said. He did not seem in the least afraid, in fact his face still wore the same strange smile. He waited until Mangantius had finished, and there was once more silence in the hall. Then he went up to the King, and begged that he might be allowed to speak. He did not wait for an answer, but at once began. "I ask one thing, my lord, before you take my life. I pray that you will command your magicians to stand here before me, and permit me to question them. I pray that you will grant me this request. Behold, I will convict your wise men of a lie, and show you how they have deceived you."

The boy spoke with the utmost conviction. He seemed far more as if he were giving a command, than as if he were asking a favour. He showed no fear, and seemed quite unaware that he was speaking to the King. He stood and faced the magicians, and waited for Vortigern to speak.

The King was half amused and half afraid. He wondered what it was this strange boy wanted to say to the magicians. He felt quite curious to know, besides he did not dare to refuse

to do as he asked. If it were true that Merlin's father was an evil spirit, it would not do to make him angry. His father might bring down unknown evils upon him. He turned to the magicians and told them all to come and sit down in front of Merlin.

The youth turned and spoke to them fearlessly. "Know then, O wise men of Kambria, that I have discovered your deceit! You recommended the shedding of my blood, and said it would enable the tower to stand, because you were ignorant, and did not know the real reason which prevents the foundations of the building from standing. I ask you all now to answer me one question. What is there underneath the place where the foundations have been laid? Answer me that question, I say. If you can do that then you will know what it is which prevents the tower from standing."

Merlin waited and looked earnestly upon the magicians, who sat before him pale with fear. "I ask you once again," he said. "What is there beneath the place where the foundations have been placed? Answer me this question, I command you."

But the magicians did not speak. They were so terror-stricken they could not have spoken, even if they had known the answer. Merlin

had discovered their secret. He knew their ignorance, and soon the King, and everyone else, would know it also. They sat shaking with fear.

Merlin turned to Vortigern. "I entreat your majesty," he said, "that you will send your workmen, and command them to dig deeply into the ground at the place where the tower was to be built. You will find that there is a large pool there, caused by an underground spring. It is this which has made the foundations of the tower sink. If my words prove not true, then let me die. But if they are true, let me live, and I will advise you, O King, better than these false ones, who think only of their own glory!"

Vortigern at once sent his workmen to prove the truth of what the boy Merlin had said. It was not long before they returned, saying they had found a deep pond far down under the ground, which had doubtless caused the foundations to sink.

From that time Merlin became the chief adviser of the King. Everyone thought he was a prophet, and believed all that he said. It was not long before he found out he could deceive people without any trouble, and he began to prophesy all kinds of wonderful things.

He told Vortigern to have the pond drained,

and said he would find two hollow stones at the bottom.

This was done, and the stones were found just as he had said.

After this everyone thought Merlin more wonderful than ever. He pretended that there were two dragons living in these hollow stones. One of the dragons was white, the other was red. He said that the red dragon stood for the Saxons, while the white one stood for the Britons. He prophesied all kinds of marvellous things about these dragons. The people thought that the prophecies foretold all that was going to happen between the Saxons and the Britons. For a long time the red dragon, or the Saxon, was to be successful, but at length the white dragon of Britain was to conquer. All these wonderful sayings were written down in a very ancient book called "The Prophecies of Merlin." Whether Merlin really said all of them, we do not know; but the Celtic people, at any rate, believe they were spoken by him.

Merlin became the greatest person in all the land. When the tower was built on the top of Mount Erir, Vortigern took him to live with himself, and made him his chief friend and adviser. In spite of the great strength of the tower, Vortigern was still frightened. He was

always fearing that the Saxons, or some other enemy would come against him. One day he asked Merlin to tell him what his future would be.

"You have told us much," he said, "about the red dragon and the white dragon. Truly, your learning is a wonderful thing. All the dark and hidden future is clear to you. No secret is too strange for you to find out. No knowledge too deep for you to know. Think now, and tell me what the future holds in store for me. I would know whether good or evil waits for me, in the days that are to come."

Now it chanced that Merlin had received secret information that Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther Pendragon were about to land in Britain with a mighty army, with which they intended to banish the Saxons, and avenge the death of their brother Constans. He had, therefore, no difficulty in telling Vortigern what his fate would be. He answered him without a moment's hesitation.

"One warning I would give to thee, O King! Fly from the sons of Constantine! Fly, while there is yet time! Behold! even now, they are fitting out their ships! They have already left the Armonican shore! They will steer towards Britain! They will fight and subdue the wicked



The Two Dragons



Saxons! But first they will come against you, O King! To your own ruin did you kill their brother, Constans, and invite the treacherous Saxons to come into the land. Again, I say to you, Escape! Seek out some refuge, if you can! To-morrow the brothers of Constans will land upon the shores of Britain!"

A great fear fell upon Vortigern, as he heard these words of Merlin. His guilty conscience took away the little courage which he naturally possessed. The worst of all that he had feared was going to happen. He had no doubt that what Merlin had said was true. Something told him that vengeance was at last to come upon him. He did not know what to do. Should he stay in his tower, and trust to its strength to protect him, or should he fly, and try to hide, where his enemies could not find him?

For a long time he remained uncertain, first thinking he would do one thing, then the other. But at last, he determined to follow the advice of Merlin, and fly. He went from place to place trying to hide himself. Finally, he settled in Genoreu, a little town in Kambria, where he thought the brothers of Constans would not be likely to find him.

Meanwhile, everything had happened as Merlin

had foretold. Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther Pendragon had landed in Britain. They were eagerly received by the British people, who felt new courage rise in their hearts, when they saw these two valiant youths, with their large band of followers. The British people implored them to come at once and fall upon the Saxons who were laying waste the land. They promised that they would do this ; but they said that first they must avenge themselves on Vortigern who had slain their brother, and driven them from their native land.

In burning words Aurelius, who was the elder of the two brothers, addressed the people. " My people, I pray you come with me to avenge this tyrant. He deserves to die, as you must each one of you know. He is of all men the most villainous. His crimes deserve inexpressible tortures ! He seized the crown by stealth ; he caused the death of my brother Constans ; and last and worst of all, he invited the Saxon pagans to take up their abode in this country ! They have expelled the nobility, laid waste this fruitful country, and almost extinguished the Christian faith over the whole kingdom. All this we owe to the villainy of this traitor. Now, therefore, my countrymen, show yourselves men ! Revenge yourself upon him, who is the cause of all these

disasters! Let us slay the traitor Vortigern, then we will turn our arms against the Saxons, and free our country from their brutish tyranny!"

These words were not without their effect. The people marched to Kambria, and before long discovered the place where Vortigern was hiding. The coward pleaded for mercy and promised in abject fear to do all the brothers desired, if they would but spare his life. It was quite useless. At last he was to meet the fate which his wickedness so richly deserved.

"Let him die like a dog," Aurelius cried. "He is too much of a coward to be worthy to fight with men. Let us burn him in his house as he crouches there, consumed with fear. Base knave, it is all the fate that he deserves!"

They piled fuel around the house. The fire raged and burnt. Vortigern the coward, the betrayer of his country, perished in the flames!

For a long time after this nothing was heard of Merlin. Some held that he had shared the fate of Vortigern and had perished in the flames. Others said that a prophet could not die, and that, when need arose, he would again come forth to foretell the future.

Some years went by. Aurelius was now King. He had fought successfully against the Saxons and had driven them into Albania, and the

northern parts of Britain. He was a good King, and wished to rule his subjects well. As soon as peace was restored he made a royal progress through his kingdom, to see all that needed doing after the wasting of the Saxons.

During his journey he came to Salisbury, the place where the British nobles, who had been slain by the treachery of the Saxons, were buried. The sight of the place where the dead lay made the good King shed tears of compassion. His heart overflowed with sorrow in thinking of his countrymen, who had been so cruelly slain. He felt that he would like to erect some monument to their memory. The place which held the bones of so many noble patriots, who had died for their country, ought to be honoured. It was not fitting that such noble deeds should be forgotten.

Aurelius therefore summoned all the chief carpenters and masons, and consulted with them about building a lasting monument to these great men. But all the workmen were afraid to undertake the work. They were diffident of their own skill, and one and all refused to do it. They said they could not erect a monument great enough to commemorate such an event.

Aurelius was in great distress, and was doubtful what he could do next. While he was still think-

ing, Tremounus, the Archbishop of the City of Legions, went to him and said:—"If anyone living is able to build the monument, Merlin, the prophet of Vortigern, is the man. He is skilful in all things, and no work is too great for him to be able to do. Order him to come to you. His power will make him able to do all that you desire."

No one knew where Merlin was to be found. But Aurelius sent messengers throughout the length and breadth of Britain, and at last, after much searching, they found him at the fountain of Galabes, which is situated in a remote part of Kambria.

He was brought to King Aurelius, who received him with much joy, and immediately asked him to deliver some of his wonderful speeches. For the King greatly desired to hear his strange prophecies.

But Merlin would not grant his request. He stood before the King and the nobles, while he solemnly uttered these words:—"O King, the mysteries of secret things may not be revealed lightly. They can only be spoken when there is the greatest need for them. Did I utter them now, for mere empty glory, the spirit which instructs me would for ever be silent."

Aurelius was too wise to be angry at this

refusal. He would not allow the nobles to trouble the prophet with any further questions, but at once began asking him if he could help him to build a fitting monument in memory of the British nobles who had been slain.

"If you wish to honour the burying-place of these princes with a great and everlasting monument," Merlin at once answered, "send for the Giant's Dance, which is in Killaraus, a mountain in Ireland. It is a wonderful structure of stones. None in this age could make it. They are of vast size and wonderful quality. If they can be placed at Salisbury round the spot of ground where the dead lie, they will stand for ever."

At these words of the prophet, Aurelius burst out laughing. "How is it possible to remove such vast stones from a distant country?" he said. "Is the island of Britain not furnished with stone, that you should propose such a thing? In truth, Prophet Merlin, you speak either in jest or in foolishness!"

Very quietly Merlin answered the King. "I entreat your Majesty to forbear from vain laughter. I speak neither in jest nor in foolishness. The Giant's Dance are mystical stones. They alone can form a fitting monument for the dead. They were brought to Ireland by the giants many years ago, from the farthest

coast of Africa. The giants brought them to make baths, which they could use in case of sickness. For the stones have wonderful power. Any sick person placed upon them is immediately cured. There is not a stone which has not some healing virtue in it."

Aurelius was so impressed by what the prophet said that he determined to send for the stones. Fifteen thousand men, led by Uther Pendragon, and guided by Merlin, at once set sail for Ireland.

They had many obstacles to overcome. Gillomanus, the King of Ireland, simply laughed when they asked him to allow them to remove the Giant's Dance to Britain. "Was ever such folly heard of?" he cried. "The Britons must be either mad, or fools, to ask such a thing."

But the Britons were not to be turned away from their object. They fought with Gillomanus, and utterly overcame him, and then went to Mount Killaraus.

The sight of the mighty pile of stones filled them with joy and admiration. They stood around the stones, and gazed at them in silent wonder.

While they were doing this, Merlin came up to them and said, "Now try your strength, young men! Let us see whether art or force can do most towards taking down these stones!"

At these words all the young men set to work with one accord, and attempted to remove the Giant's Dance. They pushed, and they shoved, and they tried to lift the stones. They fetched the engines which Merlin had caused to be brought from Britain, but they did not understand how to use them. Some put great ropes round the stones, others placed ladders against them. But it was all to no purpose. They could not even move the stones, much less lift them up so that they could carry them to the ships.

All this time Merlin stood by and laughed at their vain efforts.

"Now let us see whether skill can succeed, where strength and force fail," he said. He then placed the engines in proper order, and set the levers, and all the other contrivances he had brought with him, to work. In a very short time he had lifted up the stones and placed them on trollies, which carried them down to the ships.

As soon as this was done the Britons joyfully set sail, and, with a fair gale, soon arrived at Britain. They took the stones to Salisbury, where the King was waiting, with all the chief nobles, bishops, abbots, and a great many of the people. A solemn feast was held, which lasted for three days. The King then ordered Merlin

to set up the stones, and place them around the spot where the British heroes were buried. This Merlin did to the wonder of all the people. "Truly art is greater than strength," they said. He placed the stones in the same way as they had been in the Mountain of Killaraus, and there they have remained to this day. They are the ancient monument now called Stonehenge. People still visit this place, and it is always looked upon as one of the greatest marvels in the island of Britain.

Not long after this event, trouble again fell upon the land of Britain. The Saxons came from the North and began to lay waste the land. Merlin was the chief adviser of the Britons in this time of peril. He marched with the British army, which was led by Uther Pendragon, for King Aurelius was sick, and unable to fight.

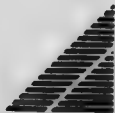
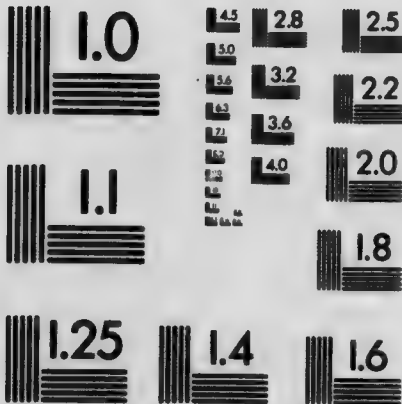
One day, as the army was marching through Kambria, they saw in the sky a star of wonderful magnitude and brightness. It sent forth rays of light, one of which was much longer and brighter than the rest. At the end of this ray was a globe of fire which seemed to take the form of a dragon, out of whose mouth came a beam of the brightest light, which threw its radiance on every side.

Prince Uther called upon Merlin to explain the meaning of this wonderful star.



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5889 - Fax

The prophet burst into tears, then cried out in a loud voice, "O irreparable loss! O distressed and unhappy people of Britain! Alas, the illustrious Prince is departed! The renowned King of the Britons, Aurelius Ambrosius is dead. His death will be fatal to us, unless God be our help."

He then turned to Uther Pendragon and said, "Make haste, most noble Uther, make haste to attack the enemy! Victory shall be yours! You shall be King of Britain! The star and the fiery dragon stand for yourself; the bright and wonderful beam shows that you shall have a son, whose might and power shall light up the world! Even as the beam spread its rays, so shall his glory extend far and near!"

The first part of Merlin's prophecy was soon proved to be true. Not many hours passed before news reached the army that Aurelius was dead. He had been slain by a poisoned draught, given to him by a treacherous Saxon, who had come into his chamber disguised as a great physician.

Uther Pendragon was at once made King. He continued to fight against the Saxons, and soon managed to drive them from the southern part of Britain. Merlin still remained as the chief adviser of the King; and when the war

was over, Uther took him to live in his own palace.

It was not long before Uther needed the services of the Prophet. It chanced that while he was travelling about, fighting the Saxons, he had seen a very beautiful lady. Her name was Igerna, the Princess of Cornwall, and she was the most lovely lady in all Britain. Uther had not thought very much about her then, because he was too busy fighting. But, when he was at peace, he could think of nothing but her beauty, and he greatly desired to make her his Queen. But Gorlois, the Duke of Cornwall, was his bitter enemy, and he knew he would never allow him to marry Igerna. In his difficulty he went to Merlin, and asked him what he must do.

The prophet promised to help him, but before he did so, he made Uther promise him a solemn vow. It was that he would give into his care the little son whom he told him would be born.

"The child is destined to be very great," Merlin said. "He will be the saviour of his people! He will deliver them from the hand of the Saxon! He must not be brought up as other boys! His training must be in my hand! For, behold, it was for this reason that I was born! For what else was life given unto me,

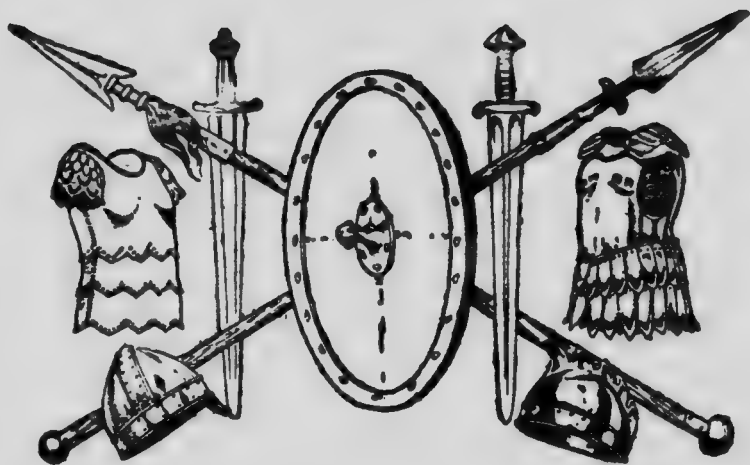
90 Early British Heroes

except that I might train Arthur, the mighty Prince of the British nation?"

King Uther promised to do all that Merlin desired. For he loved the beautiful Igerna very much, and would do anything to have her for his wife.

Merlin fulfilled his promise. He brought Igerna to the King, and he made her Queen of Britain. Some time later a little son was born. He was a beautiful boy, and both the King and Queen were very sad at the thought that they must give him to the Prophet Merlin. But they did not dare to break the solemn promise which Uther had made. When Merlin came and claimed the baby boy, they very sorrowfully gave him into his keeping.

Merlin carried the child away; no one knew where. And for many years nothing was heard of Merlin the Prophet, or the baby Prince.



STORY V

The reign of Arthur, the great hero Prince. He fights the Saxons, and frees the land from their power. He becomes very great and conquers many lands, but at last he is mortally wounded, by the treachery of his nephew Modred.

[NOTE.—Arthur is the great hero of the Celtic people. We find something about him in all the old songs and legends. It was from these stories that Geoffrey of Monmouth probably took his account of Arthur. From history we know very little about this great Prince. All that it says is that there was a Prince of South Britain, called Arthur, who fought valiantly against the Saxons.

We do not know why Arthur was chosen as the national hero. But from the very earliest times this seems to have been done. The Celts believed that Arthur was still alive. They all looked forward to the time when he would come back, and restore the British race to its former glory. In one old book it is stated that anyone who said that Arthur was dead was in danger of being stoned. All sorts of stories were told

about what he was doing. Some said he had taken the form of a raven. And so many people believed this story that it became a capital crime in Wales to kill a raven. Others held that he was living under the earth, preparing for a very great war.

The great work that Geoffrey did was to gather all these stories together and give them a lasting form in his history. Ever since his day writers have written about Arthur, the hero Prince. Layamon, a poor parish priest, who lived not very long after Geoffrey, wrote about him in English, so that the poor people could read the book. Wace, a Frenchman, wrote about him in French, and grand ladies and gentlemen, both in France and England, eagerly read his story. Their account was longer and fuller than Geoffrey's. It is they who tell the story of the elves taking Arthur and tending him when he was a tiny baby, and of the two women who fetched him in their wonderful boat when he was dying. They also give the account of the quarrel which led to the building of the famous Round Table.

Many other writers, at a later date, wrote about Arthur; and last of all Tennyson, the poet of our own time, tells his story afresh in his beautiful "Idylls of the King."]

UTHER PENDRAGON was dead. Like his brother Aurelius, he had been slain by the treachery of the Saxons. For they had once more broken forth from the North, and were marching up and down the country destroying both cities and people. A vast fleet of their countrymen came from Germany to help them. They laid the whole island waste with fire and with sword.

The British people were panic-stricken. Their King was dead. The nobles spent their

time in quarrelling. Day by day the Saxons were gaining more power. It seemed as if they would soon reconquer the whole island.

At length, the chief nobles, and the bishops and abbots called a meeting at Silchester to talk matters over, and decide what must be done. Unfortunately they could not agree upon any course of action. Each thought that what he proposed was best; and each noble wanted to have all the power in his own hands.

In the midst of this scene of confusion, the prophet Merlin all at once appeared, leading by the hand a very beautiful boy. Everybody was utterly taken by surprise. It was now many years since anyone had heard of the Prophet. His name was almost forgotten. It seemed like a miracle that he should appear suddenly in this way.

Merlin had grown old, during the years that had passed. His form was bowed with age, and he leant heavily upon the stick which he carried in his hand. His long locks and his beard, which fell down to his waist, were white as snow. But his eyes still flashed with their old brightness, and his voice rang out as of old.

"Cease this unseemly quarrelling!" he cried. "Have you forgotten that you are Britons, the sons of a hero race? Cowards and weaklings! You fight and wrangle among yourselves while

your country is given up to the spoil of the Pagans! Is this what the race of Britain has fallen to? In truth, you deserve the fate the Saxon is bringing upon you! Think not that any of you shall rule this land! It is not fit that the country of Brutus should be governed by such as you!"

He then turned to the boy who had been standing all this time by his side. He took him by the right hand and placed him in front of him where all the nobles could see him. He then drew from the folds of his flowing robe a crown of pure gold. It was all set with flashing stones. The prophet took it in his hand and placed it upon the boy's head. "Behold your King," he said, "Arthur, the son of Uther Pendragon and the beautiful Igerna! Bow your knees and do him homage! For he is great and his name shall be a name of everlasting honour to his race! He shall establish his country and bring it back to glory! I, Merlin the Prophet, declare it! And you know of old, no words of mine can fall away from the truth. Listen, now, while I tell you the history of your King. I took the boy while he was still a babe from his father's Court. For it was not fitting that such a child should be reared by mortal's care. I carried him away to the depths of a lonely wood. There we lived for many years away from the haunts

of men. The elves and fairies came and tended the babe and gave him food to eat. More than this, they chanted the babe with strong magic. They gave him might and power so that he should grow to be the best of all knights. They gave him another thing that he should come to be a rich and mighty king. They gave him a third thing that he should live long. All this the elves gave him, and in this way the child grew and thrived. For the elves gave him virtues most great, so that now he is the noblest and most generous of all men alive. Such is the history of the boy. Look upon him now as he stands before you. No mortal King, but Arthur, the hero Prince! sent by God to deliver the land!"

Merlin finished, and all the company of nobles and priests knelt and paid homage to the boy. No one doubted the truth of Merlin's story. They were all glad to receive Arthur as their King and leader.

From that day the fortunes of Britain turned. Everything that Arthur did seemed to prosper. He was only fifteen, but, boy as he was, he showed unparalleled courage and generosity. His sweetness of temper and natural goodness gained him the love of all his people. The right was always very dear to him. He was a true guide and comforter to his people. But to the wicked and the unwise he was wonderfully stern.

96 Early British Heroes

For wrong-doing was exceedingly loathsome to him.

The British people went with him gladly to fight against the Saxons. They were proud to serve under his standard. Indeed, there was no one in the land who would not have died for their boy King. It was not long before Colgrin, the Saxon leader, was utterly overcome. In despair he came and asked Arthur to grant the Saxons liberty to return to Germany. He offered to give up all the treasures they had collected into the hands of the Britons. "All we care for," he said, "is that we may be allowed to depart from Britain while we are yet alive."

Their request was granted, and Arthur gave them ships with which to return to their native land.

They soon set sail, and the Britons thought they were rid of them for ever. But alas for their hopes! The Saxons had not got very far when they met a large fleet of soldiers coming to Britain from Germany. They at once repented the bargain they had made and turned their boats round, and again sailed towards Britain. They landed close to the Severn sea, where they put all the peasants to the sword and began laying waste the country.

Arthur was beyond measure surprised when he heard of their treachery. "These Saxons

have failed to keep faith with me," he cried. "Now, by the help of God, I will revenge the blood of my countrymen upon them! To arms, soldiers, to arms! Christ will give us the victory! These perfidious wretches shall be utterly overcome!"

Far and wide over the land the message went. Every man who could bear arms was to come and fight, to revenge the treachery of the Saxons.

Every Briton was eager to answer the call, and a vast army was soon collected.

On the eve of the battle, St Dubricius, the Archbishop of the City of Legions, addressed the men, by Arthur's orders. He went up to the top of a hill, which stood near where the army was encamped, and cried out with a loud voice, "Men of Britain, you have the honour to belong to the Christian faith! Keep fixed in your minds the love which you owe to your country, and to your fellow subjects! Their sufferings, caused by the treachery of the Pagans, will be an everlasting reproach to you, if you do not courageously defend them! Remember it is your country that you fight for; and if need be suffer death, and think of this, that death itself will be victory! For he who dies for his brethren, offers himself a living sacrifice to God. He has Christ for his example, who laid down

His life for His brethren. If, therefore, any of you shall be killed in this war, death will give you glory. Your name will be remembered with honour and praise, and God Himself will reward you."

Next day, the fight began. The British soldiers, encouraged by the Archbishop's words, fought with the utmost valour. They were led by Arthur, who was ever found where the conflict was most deadly.

He was dressed in a coat of mail of great magnificence, and suitable to his royal birth. On his head he had a golden helmet, on which was engraved the figure of a dragon. He was guarded by a wonderful shield, which hung upon his shoulders. It was called *Periwen*, and the picture of Mary, the mother of Christ, was painted upon it. In this way he was able to think of holy matters all through the battle. The sword he fought with was *Caliburn*, the magic sword, which had been made in the isle of *Avalon*, and had such strength that no man could withstand its power. Besides this, he carried his lance, named *Ron*, which was hard and broad, and fit for slaughter.

The Saxons were encamped on the top of a high hill. This gave them great advantage. Again and again Arthur and the Britains charged

the sides of the hill. The Saxons poured down arrows and other missiles upon them, and for a long time drove them back. But Arthur would not be repulsed, and at last, after a desperate struggle, the Britons gained the summit of the hill. They now fought their enemy hand to hand. They had a difficult task, for the Saxons gave them a warm reception, and made a most vigorous defence. All through the day the fighting went on, and towards evening it still seemed uncertain which side would gain the victory.

Arthur was provoked to see the little advantage the Britons had gained. He was determined that the fate of the day should no longer remain uncertain. He drew out his good sword Caliburn, and calling upon Christ to help him, he rushed forward into the thickest of the enemy's ranks. He seemed possessed of more than human power. No Saxon who felt the fury of his sword escaped alive. His Caliburn killed four hundred and seventy men.

The Britons seeing this, followed their King. The whole body of them fell upon the Saxons with terrible fury, and made great slaughter amongst them. Colgrin and all the Saxon leaders were slain. Many thousands of the common soldiers lay dead upon the field. The

100 Early British Heroes

power of the Saxon was crushed. It would be long before they would be able to trouble Britain any further.

Arthur now gave his time to the restoration of his kingdom. He visited all the chief cities of the country, and repaired the mischief wrought by the Saxons. In everything he showed the greatest wisdom, and his power spread far and near. He introduced such politeness and gentleness into his Court that his knights became the pattern for all the world. The fashion of their clothes and arms was eagerly copied. Everyone wanted to be like Arthur's knights, and the highest ambition of any young nobleman was to be allowed to serve under his banner.

He added to his government Ireland, Iceland, Gothland and the Orkneys, and subdued the Kings of Norway, Dacia, Aquitaine and Gaul.

He gained the latter country by fighting a duel with Flollo, the Roman tribune, who was the governor of Gaul. The Britons were trying to conquer that country. Many battles were fought and much blood was shed on either side. At last Flollo sent a messenger to Arthur and proposed that, instead of any further fighting, they should fight a duel. "Our people perish daily," he said, "on every hand falls British and Gallic blood! Let us stay this waste of human

life! If it please you, let us two fight alone, and decide the quarrel. Whichever of us gains the victory, he shall be governor of Gaul."

Now Flollo was very strong. He was taller than most men and very bold and courageous. He made this proposal to Arthur, because he was sure of gaining the victory. He had fought with many men and none of them had been able to withstand his might. He did not doubt that he would be able to kill Arthur, as he had done his other foes.

Arthur was not afraid. He took his good sword Caliburn and his lance Ron, and fearlessly went to meet the Roman tribune. The two rulers made a brilliant picture as they stood ready to begin their duel. They were both gracefully dressed and armed, and were mounted on admirably swift horses. It was hard to tell which of them gave the greatest hopes of victory.

For a few moments they stood still facing each other, with their lances held aloft above their heads, then they put spurs to their horses, and began fiercely to attack each other. Flollo was the stronger and heavier; but Arthur handled his lance more warily. With a skilful thrust, he struck it into the upper part of Flollo's breast, and laid him prostrate on the ground. He drew his sword, and was about to finish his work with

102 Early British Heroes

a mortal blow, when Flollo, starting up, sprang to his feet. He couched his lance, and dealt a deadly blow to Arthur's horse, just as the British King was about to fall upon him with his sword. Both rider and beast instantly fell to the ground.

The Britons, who were looking on, saw their King lying prostrate on the field. They thought that he was dead. With a shout of mingled rage and despair, they prepared to rush into the lists. They would wreak vengeance upon the Gallic leader, who had killed their beloved King. But Arthur sprang up and waved them back. He seized a horse from a servant, who was standing near, and, quickly mounting, again advanced against Flollo.

The two Kings fought with the utmost rage. Each of them was bent on causing the other's destruction. Flollo gave Arthur a blow upon the forehead, that would have proved mortal if the edge of his weapon had not been blunted by Arthur's helmet. As it was, the coat of mail and shield of the British King were red with blood. This inflamed Arthur's rage still more. He lifted his Caliburn, and struck it, with his utmost strength, through Flollo's helmet, right into his head. It made a terrible gash, and the Roman tribune fell down, tearing the ground with his spurs, and soon expired.

Early British Heroes 103

After this conquest Arthur was ruler of the greater portion of Europe. He determined to celebrate his victories by holding a great festival, to which he would invite all the Kings and Dukes who were under his rule. The festival was to be held in the City of Legions, a town in Glamorganshire, upon the river Uske, and near the Severn sea. This would allow the princes, who came from the countries beyond the seas, to sail easily up to the town.

Many weeks were spent in preparing for this feast, which was to be carried out with the utmost magnificence. Nothing like it had ever been held in the island of Britain. Every prince of any consideration on this side of Spain was asked to come to the festival. They all responded to the invitation, and Britain was soon filled with the nobility of Europe.

It chanced that one day, some weeks before the feast began, a number of these princes sat down to dine with Arthur and the British knights. While they were waiting for the meal to be served, they began to quarrel about the places they were to occupy at the table. The hearts of both the princes and the knights were full of proud thoughts. Each one considered that he was of higher rank, and of more importance, than his companions. When the time

104 Early British Heroes

came for them to sit down at the table, each one tried to get the best place, so that he might sit above his fellows.

This led to a scene of the utmost confusion and quarrelling. The princes seized the loaves and the other things that were on the table, and threw them about. Then they took up the silver bowls filled with wine and hurled them at each other. When all these had been thrown, they approached each other's necks with firm closed fists. And last of all, swords were drawn and a fight began, in which many were wounded.

When Arthur arrived and heard what had happened, he was deeply grieved. He at once called out, in a loud and commanding voice, "Sit ye down! Sit ye down! And who does not obey me instantly, shall be put to death."

In this way peace was at last brought back. But the heart of good King Arthur was very heavy. He wished that he had never planned to hold the festival, if this were the result. It grieved him very deeply to think that his princes and nobles had disgraced themselves with foolish quarrelling.

While he was still sorrowing, Merlin came up and desired to speak with him. The prophet was now very old, but he was still Arthur's constant adviser.

"Hail, Arthur, noblest of Kings," he cried. "Sorrow not for the foolishness of thy knights! I will tell thee a way out of thy difficulty. Behold, I know a crafty workman who understands of tree works many wondrous crafts. I will command him now to make for thee a board exceeding fair. It shall be round and very large, so that sixteen hundred or more may be able to sit all round it. In this way there will be none outside, and no one will have a better place than his fellow. And when thou journeyest, thou canst carry the table with thee, so that no moody knights can ever make fight again!"

Arthur was greatly pleased with this proposal. He ordered Merlin to see at once about having the table made. In four weeks' time it was ready. Arthur summoned all the knights and princes to come to him, and for the first time they gathered about the famous Round Table. From that day they never dined at any other board, and soon Arthur's knights were known throughout the world as "The Knights of the Round Table."

The day of the festival at length arrived. Everything was ready, Arthur and all the kings, princes, nobles and knights were assembled in the City of Legions. The first part of the ceremony was a service of thanksgiving to God,

106 Early British Heroes

to thank Him for all He had done for the British nation. Arthur walked to the cathedral clad in his royal robes, and with the crown of Britain upon his head. Beside him walked the Prophet Merlin and the two chief archbishops. Before him went four kings bearing four golden swords. After him followed all the princes, nobles and knights, and a great number of the common people. Beautiful music accompanied the procession, making wonderful harmony.

From another direction came a second procession headed by the Queen, dressed in all her richest ornaments. Four queens walked before her, carrying four pure white doves, while after her came all the ladies of noble birth.

The two processions went to two different churches. The King to the cathedral, and the Queen to the Temple of Virgins. In each a service of thanksgiving was held. The music of the instruments and the voices of the choir were so beautiful, that those who heard them said they sounded like heavenly strains.

When the divine service was over, the King and Queen put off their crowns, and went to the palace to partake of the banquets which had been prepared. The King went to one banquet-hall, and the Queen to another. For the Britons still kept up the ancient custom of Troy,

by which men and women used to hold their feasts apart.

Arthur and the kings, nobles and knights sat down at the great Round Table. Caius, the sewer, who had charge of the feast, served up the numerous dishes. He was dressed in rich robes of ermine, and a thousand young noblemen, dressed in the same way, helped him to serve the feast. At the same time, Bedever, the butler, aided by a thousand more young noblemen, filled up the cups and drinking vessels with rich sparkling wine. The Queen's banquet was no less splendid. Indeed, it would take a whole volume to tell of the grandeur of the feasts.

As soon as the banquets were over, the whole company went into the fields outside the city, and gave themselves up to all kinds of sports. The military men held sham fights, at which the ladies looked on, encouraging the fighters with cheers and smiles. Others spent their time in shooting with bows and arrows, tossing the pike, casting heavy stones, and many other sports. All was done without quarrelling or disagreement. In each case the victor received a rich prize, which was given to him by Arthur or the Queen.

In this way three days were spent. On the

fourth, an event happened which put an end to this joyous festival. A letter arrived from Lucius, the procurator or ruler of Rome, upbraiding Arthur for his conquest of Gaul, and commanding him to pay tribute to the Roman senate. It also told him to come immediately to Rome to answer for his conduct.

This message caused the utmost indignation. The festival was at once broken up, and Arthur called a meeting of all the tributary kings and British princes, to consult with him as to what answer should be sent to Rome. It did not take long for them to decide as to what this answer should be. One and all said that the only reply to such a message was a declaration of war.

The utmost enthusiasm prevailed among the princes. They were all eager to go and fight against Rome. Everyone promised to support Arthur. "We will fight for you, whether we conquer or whether we die," was the cry of them all.

It was not long before the army was ready. Britain was left in the care of Modred, Arthur's nephew, as Arthur himself went to Rome to lead his army in person.

Once more good fortune attended all he did. In every fight he was successful. Every plan

he made prospered. He met the Roman general, Lucius, in a great battle. The shouts, the slaughter, the blood spilled, and the cries of the dying made a dreadful scene of horror! Arthur rushed among the Romans and fought with a fury which made terrible havoc! With one blow he laid dead upon the ground every man whom he touched! Lucius was killed, and the Romans fled, like a flock of sheep from a raging hungry lion!

The Britons had completely conquered. Rome lay at the feet of Arthur. The vanquished people shamefully held forth their hands to receive their chains. They surrendered their liberty in order to save their lives.

But while the Britons were still rejoicing at this great victory, terrible news arrived from Britain. Modred had proved faithless to his trust. He had called in the Saxons, the Picts and Scots, and the Irish to help him, and had seized the crown.

Without an instant's delay Arthur returned to Britain. His heart was very sad. The treachery of his nephew weighed upon his spirit. His gentle, noble soul could not understand such guilt.

He went at once to fight against Modred, who was waiting for him with an immense army.

110 Early British Heroes

chiefly composed of the Saxons, who had come from Germany to help him. Long and fiercely the two armies fought, but in the end the Britons were successful. Modred was slain, and his Saxon mercenaries fled. But alas for the British nation! Sorrow came to them that day! Arthur, their hero Prince, was wounded! Once more Britain was left without a leader!

"Woe, woe to Britain! Unhappy nation! Thy Prince is dead! Thy sun is set! Thy glory is over!" cried Merlin, when he learnt the bitter news. And in grief the old man died, broken-hearted, at the overthrow of Arthur's kingdom.

The British people could not believe that Arthur was really dead. The old legends say that, as soon as he was wounded, a tiny boat came from the sea, floating with the waves. In it were two women, wondrously formed. The story says that they took Arthur and bore him to the boat, where they laid him softly down, then began to depart.

Thus the British people believe that Arthur is still alive. They say that the women bore him to Avalon, where they think he still dwells. One day, they say, he will come again to restore the glory of the British race. For this reason

Early British Heroes I I I

they have written on Arthur's tomb at Glastonbury, as Avalon is now called :—

"Hic jacet Arthurus rex quondam rexque futurus"—"Here lies Arthur once a King, and still a King to be."

CRANE & NEWALL, Printers, Toronto, Ontario

